

# **Gynaehorror: Women, theory and horror film**

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# CONTENTS

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>ABSTRACT .....</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>LIST OF FIGURES.....</b>	<b>viii</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>(RE)CONCEPTIONS: THEORISING WOMEN IN HORROR.....</b>	<b>16</b>
Horror and psychoanalysis.....	18
Women, horror and psychoanalysis.....	23
Challenges to psychoanalysis.....	31
Alternatives to psychoanalysis: the social, the mythic, the taboo .....	36
From theories of horror to theorising with horror .....	42
Home invasions .....	49
Rethinking space.....	58
<b>ROSES AND THORNS: VIRGINITY, <i>VAGINA DENTATA</i> AND FEMALE SEXUALITY .....</b>	<b>61</b>
Defining virginity .....	62
Virginity in the horror film .....	67
The virgin hero .....	68
The sacrificial virgin .....	70
Male virginity: humour and horror .....	73
Virginity and generic compulsion .....	76
From virgin to <i>vagina dentata</i> .....	77
Representing the vagina: art and appearance.....	81
The <i>vagina dentata</i> in horror.....	85
<i>The Unholy</i> : the slut, the virgin and the priest.....	87
<i>Teeth</i> : reframing <i>vagina dentata</i> .....	89
Sex, abstinence and positive sexuality .....	91
<i>Teeth</i> , irony and empowerment.....	96
<i>Teeth</i> and the sexual vigilante .....	100
Enforcing heterosexuality .....	102

<b>THE LADY VANISHES: PREGNANCY, ABORTION AND SUBJECTIVITY .....</b>	<b>105</b>
Constructing and challenging the pregnant subject.....	107
Theories of pregnancy subjectivity .....	109
The body, abstracted: the displacement of the subject.....	117
The pregnant body in religious horror .....	118
<i>The Reaping</i> : the pregnant body as vessel .....	120
<i>Prophecy</i> : the pregnant body as environment.....	123
Foetal visibility and the dissolution of the female subject .....	126
<i>Inside</i> : competing subjects .....	131
Abortion and taboo .....	137
'Pro-life' and <i>Pro-Life</i> .....	140
<b>NOT OF WOMAN BORN: MAD SCIENCE, REPRODUCTIVE TECHNOLOGY AND ERASURE.....</b>	<b>146</b>
Science and masculinity.....	147
'Mad science' and men making life .....	153
Fear of science .....	156
<i>The Unborn</i> : mad scientists and madwomen.....	160
Female mad scientists and <i>Splice</i> .....	165
Brave new worlds? Cyborg futures and pregnant subjectivity .....	170
<b>THE MONSTROUS MATERNAL: NEGOTIATING DISCOURSES OF MOTHERHOOD .</b>	<b>175</b>
Psychoanalytic discourses of motherhood.....	178
The legacy of Mrs Bates: Norma, Thelma and Nola.....	182
Maternalism and essential motherhood.....	189
Motherhood as instinct and imperative.....	191
Legal implications of transgressive motherhood.....	193
Millennial mothering.....	196
The 'horror' of the single mother .....	198
<i>Triangle</i> : maternal atonement and perpetual punishment.....	202
<i>Grace</i> : competing discourses of motherhood .....	208
Monstrous motherhood .....	215

## **(RE)PRODUCTIVE BECOMINGS: A SCHIZOANALYSIS OF THE *ALIEN* TETRALOGY 219**

Analysing the <i>Alien</i> tetralogy .....	221
Ways of working with Deleuze and Guattari .....	224
Schizoanalysis and / of horror film .....	227
Micropolitics: molarity and molecularity.....	232
Micropolitics: lines of flight .....	236
The Company.....	239
Fascism and the Body without Organs.....	242
What do bodies do?.....	245
Schizoanalysis and becoming-Alien .....	247
<i>Alien</i> : the invisible maternal.....	248
<i>Aliens</i> : the explicit maternal .....	252
<i>Alien</i> <sup>3</sup> : the invasive maternal.....	258
<i>Alien: Resurrection</i> : maternal becomings.....	263
The potential for future becomings.....	271
<b>CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>273</b>
<b>FILMOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>279</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>289</b>

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis offers an analysis of women in horror film through an in depth exploration of what I term ‘gynaehorror’ – horror films that are concerned with female sex, sexuality and reproduction. While this is a broad and fruitful area of study, work in it has been shaped by a pronounced emphasis upon psychoanalytic theory, which I argue has limited the field of inquiry. To challenge this, this thesis achieves three things. Firstly, I interrogate a subgenre of horror that has not been studied in depth for twenty years, but that is experiencing renewed interest. Secondly, I analyse aspects of this subgenre outside of the dominant modes of inquiry by placing an emphasis upon philosophies of sex, gender and corporeality, rather than focussing on psychodynamic approaches. Thirdly, I consider not only what these theories may do for the study of horror films, but what spaces of inquiry horror films may open up within these philosophical areas.

To do this, I focus on six broad streams: the current limitations and opportunities in the field of horror scholarship, which I augment with a discussion of women’s bodies, houses and spatiality; the relationship between normative heterosexuality and the twin figures of the chaste virgin and the voracious *vagina dentata*; the representation and expression of female subjectivity in horror films that feature pregnancy and abortion; the manner in which reproductive technology is bound up within hegemonic constructions of gender and power, as is evidenced by the figure of the ‘mad scientist’; the way that discourses of motherhood and maternity in horror films shift over time, but nonetheless result in the demonisation of the mother; and the theoretical and corporeal possibilities opened up through Deleuze and Guattari’s model of schizoanalysis, with specific regard to the *Alien* films. As such, this thesis makes a unique contribution to the study of women in horror film, while also advocating for an expansion of the theoretical repertoire available to the horror scholar.

## LIST OF FIGURES

**Fig. 1.1 Christine unmask the Phantom:** after seeing the Phantom's horrific face, Christine falls to the floor in terror. His furious speech, delivered as he roughly drags her face up towards his, is presented through title cards: "Feast your eyes – glut your soul, on my accursed ugliness! Oh, mad Christine, who would not heed my warning!" His is a controlling look: she offers to be his slave if he lets her go (*The Phantom of the Opera*).

**Fig. 1.2 Open home:** Rosemary and Guy's new apartment is at first open and welcoming... (*Rosemary's Baby*)

**Fig. 1.3 Closed home:** ... but becomes increasingly oppressive the longer Rosemary is pregnant. The low angle shot gives the impression that the apartment is looming over Rosemary, who adopts a near foetal position (*Rosemary's Baby*).

**Fig 1.4 Home invasions:** Proteus forces an endoscope into Susan's mouth using Joshua, a rudimentary robot, as his arm. Susan's captivity is displayed for the audience in a manner that sexualises her bondage (*Demon Seed*).

**Fig 2.1 Shedding her skin:** Jennifer attacks one of her male schoolmates, revealing her succubus form and hinged jaw (*Jennifer's Body*).

**Fig. 2.2 Banned publicity material:** Advertising material for sculptor Greg Taylor's exhibition *CUNTS ...and other conversations* ("Bits & Pieces").

**Fig 2.3 A biology lesson:** Dawn removes the sticker covering up the image of female genitalia in her biology textbook, and is surprised to find out what exists between her legs (*Teeth*).

**Fig. 2.4 Scream queen:** In a nod to B movie conventions, Dawn covers her mouth in exaggerated horror and highly dramatic music plays as she reads about the origins of the *vagina dentata* myth (*Teeth*).

**Fig 2.5: The threat of pollution:** The film's opening shot pans across to a pair of nuclear cooling stacks before tilting down to reveal Dawn's idyllic suburban



(nuclear) family home, on the day of the film's inciting childhood incident, when young Brad has his finger snipped by infant Dawn's vagina (*Teeth*).

**Fig. 3.1 Inner space:** Swedish photographer Lennart Nilsson's famous photograph of a 20-week old foetus sucking its thumb (Lennart Nilsson Photography).

**Fig. 3.2 Outer space:** The 'star child', who appears at the end of *2001: A Space Odyssey*, explicitly draws from Nilsson's imagery and represents humanity's transcendent re-birth.

**Fig. 3.3 Looking inside:** The opening title sequence of *Inside* pairs blurry, almost abstract images of viscera with sonogram images.

**Fig. 3.4 Mother and child:** As Sarah grimaces and thrusts up her arms in defence, so too does the computer generated image of her unborn child (*Inside*).

**Fig. 4.1 Mad science:** Virginia regards one of the many luminous orbs that are housing Dr Meyerling's super-foetuses, before shooting at them and destroying the facility. The presentation of the foetuses explicitly recalls Lennart Nilsson's iconic foetal photography (*The Unborn*).

**Fig. 4.2 A privileged vantage point:** (left to right) A high angle shot of Virginia being anaesthetised is followed by a low angle shot that emphasises the power the doctors have over her. We see the needle penetrate her stomach and the egg is aspirated and mixed with a white fluid. We are shown the newly fertilised egg itself, wriggling around, before returning to a shot of Virginia post-operation (*The Unborn*).

**Fig. 4.3 Sexy female mad scientist c.1961:** Well-coiffed female mad scientist Dr Myra, who is of indeterminate Eastern European origin, spends the film wearing an evening gown, which she occasionally covers with a white lab coat (*Teenage Zombies*).

**Fig. 4.4 Sexy female mad scientist c.1999:** Dr Susan McAlester exposes her cleavage in the theatrical release poster for *Deep Blue Sea*.

**Fig 5.1 “Classic Joan d’ Arc protecting child from danger”:** In the original publicity image for *Aliens*, Ripley-as-mother carries the young girl Newt, protecting her from the furious Alien Queen (Mike Salisbury, “James Cameron Bummed Me Out”).

**Fig 5.2. Repetition and fragmentation:** Greg’s image is split and repeated by a mirror in the ship’s ballroom in an early suggestion of the film’s repetitive time loop (*Triangle*).

**Fig 5.3 Three Jesses:** a triple image of Jess butchering one of her companions is reflected and repeated in the mirror of room 237, alluding to the three Jesses that are on board the cruise liner and the eventual death of the ‘bad’ Jess at the close of the film (*Triangle*).

**Fig. 5.4 The *döppelgänger*:** after the deaths of her companions, a traumatised Jess considers herself in the mirror. Immediately following this, the camera passes through the mirror and follows mirror-Jess as she looks out to sea and sees the yacht re-approaching (*Triangle*).

**Fig. 5.5 Encouraging lactation:** Vivian initiates sexual contact with her husband so that he will suckle her, but discourages him from touching her elsewhere and does not reciprocate (*Grace*).

**Fig. 5.6 Encouraging conception:** Similarly, at the beginning of the film Madeline lies back, disengaged, with her eyes fixed on the ceiling until her husband reaches orgasm (*Grace*).

**Fig. 6.1 Rupture:** Anna’s line of flight is visually expressed as a ring of light that becomes a pulsating star-like ball, before finally resolving itself as a bright circle around Anna’s pupil (*Martyrs*).

**Fig. 6.2 Clinical lines:** the clean, smooth white stasis pods open up as the *Nostramo* wakes the sleeping crew (*Alien*).

**Fig 6.3 Alien abstraction:** The human explorers are dwarfed by the immense cartilaginous biomechanical landscape of the derelict ship, which is infested with Alien eggs (*Alien*).

**Fig. 6.4 Component parts:** Where the sleeping pods of the *Nostromo* had soft, almost organic curves, the pods of the military vessel U.S.S. *Sulaco* emphasise repetition and utility rather than comfort. Here, the sleeping soldiers are more obviously parts in a larger machine (*Aliens*).

**Fig 6.5 Ripley and the Queen:** Ripley, carrying her child-proxy, and the Queen, who is in the process of laying eggs, regard one another with fear and hostility in a series of shot / reverse shots (*Aliens*)

**Fig. 6.6 “The final cat-fight between the moms”:** Ripley and the Alien Queen, each of whom are hulking, monstrous iterations of maternal affect, engage in hand-to-hand combat (*Aliens*).

**Fig. 6.7 The Company is everywhere:** bars, perpendicular features, a pronounced contrast between light and shadow and sharply angled shots emphasise the size and control of the Company, even though the prisoners, technically, are self-governing. Note the way that the massive struts on the left hand side of the image evoke the ‘W’ and ‘Y’ of ‘Weyland-Yutani’ (*Alien<sup>3</sup>*).

**Fig. 6.8 Saint Ripley:** Ripley falls backwards into the foundry, arms wide, then as the Queen bursts from her chest she holds it close, evoking the image of a martyred saint. The two recede as they fall, then disappear into the roiling blossoms of the bright molten lead (*Alien<sup>3</sup>*).

**Fig. 6.9 Ripley’s new way of being:** Ripley 8 is peered at by the Company scientists on the USM *Auriga* in a shot that recalls both the star child of *2001: A Space Odyssey* and Sandro Botticelli’s painting “The Birth of Venus” (*Alien: Resurrection*).

**Fig 6.10 The excision of the Queen:** The scientists, in identical gowns and identical haircuts, their image split into bands, are fragmented machinic components of the ship and the Company (*Alien: Resurrection*).

**Fig 6.11 Abortive lines:** Ripley 8 inspects the previous, non-viable iterations of the Ripley-Queen clone. The sickly yellow light conveys a sense of organic decay (*Alien: Resurrection*).

**Fig. 6.12 “Look! He thinks you’re its mother!”** The newborn human-alien hybrid regards Ripley 8 and licks her, recognising her – and not the cloned Queen – as its mother. Note the rich sepia tones of the Alien milieu (*Alien: Resurrection*).

## INTRODUCTION

*When woman is not being either hunted or violated, she appears only as a spoil-sport. Just look at the unhappy girlfriends of Jekyll and Frankenstein who, if their words had not been ignored, would have succeeded in preventing the pursuit of all those impassioned experiments.*

Gérard Lenne, "Monster and Victim: Women in the Horror Film" (35)

*Throughout history, and across cultures, the reproductive body of woman has provoked fascination and fear. It is a body deemed dangerous and defiled, the myth of the monstrous feminine made flesh, yet also a body which provokes adoration and desire, enthrallment with the mysteries within. We see this ambivalent relationship played out in mythological, literary and artistic representations of the feminine, where woman is positioned as powerful, impure and corrupt, source of moral physical contamination; or as sacred, asexual and nourishing, a phantasmic signifier of threat extinguished. Central to this positioning of the female body as monstrous or beneficent is ambivalence associated with the power and danger perceived to be inherent in woman's fecund flesh, her seeping, leaking bleeding womb standing as a site of pollution and source of dread.*

Jane M. Ussher, *Managing the Monstrous Feminine: Regulating the Reproductive Body* (1)

Gérard Lenne's dismissive comments above, which come from his 1979 article "Monster and Victim: Women in the Horror Film", indicate how far the study of women in horror cinema has come, for since his blunt appraisal the issues of women, reproduction and sexual difference have been a recurring strain in horror scholarship. Three key pieces of feminist film theory – Linda Williams' 1983 article "When the Woman Looks", Carol J. Clover's influential analysis of gender in horror, which she

expanded from a 1987 article into her 1992 book *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*, and Barbara Creed's work on the maternal and abjection, which culminated in the 1993 book *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism and Psychoanalysis* - have had a profound influence upon the fields of gender, monstrosity and spectatorship. Each also owes a great debt to the focus on psychoanalytic modes of inquiry that was present in the development of feminist film theory in the 1970s. This emphasis has continued; indeed, two of the most recent book-length works on women in horror, David Greven's *Representations of Femininity in American Genre Cinema: The Woman's Film, Film Noir, and Modern Horror* (2011) and Sarah Arnold's *Maternal Horror Film: Melodrama and Motherhood* (2013) rely, respectively, predominantly and entirely on psychoanalytic theories of the maternal melodrama, and Arnold goes so far as to suggest that this methodology is essential to the understanding of the mother in film. However, as I will argue over the course of this thesis, the ongoing dominance of psychoanalytic theories (which can perhaps be considered wryly as the loudest voices in the room) has restricted the scope of inquiry. As such, I assert that, despite the undoubted influence of some of these works, the area of women and horror has been and remains under-theorised.

To address what I consider to be a significant blind spot, this thesis contributes three things. The first is practical: to provide a broad yet comprehensive appraisal of what I term 'gynaehorror', horror films that are concerned with women and their reproductive bodies and lives. I suggest that this strand of horror can be seen as both a subgenre in its own right as well as an area of fascination within the broader horror genre. My emphasis draws, in part, from the sorts of concerns voiced by Jane M. Ussher above - namely, that historically women's bodies have been positioned as a site of horror and ambivalence, in which women are framed as either sanctified and asexual, or dangerous and threatening, something that is popularly termed the Madonna / whore dichotomy. Of course, this is a problematic and often misogynistic designation that has a serious impact upon the way women's lives are framed and lived; as feminist philosopher Christine Battersby contends:

The 'experience' of the female human in our culture has direct links with the anomalous, the monstrous, the inconsistent and the paradoxical... a mode of selfhood that is positioned between freedom and rationality, on the one hand, and passive and thing-like embodiment, on the other. (11)

The tension of this binary is explicitly apparent in the horror film, and it is an issue to which I will frequently return. However, misogynistic or gynaephobic matters are not always obviously presented. As feminist film theorist Annette Kuhn asserts:

Given the argument that in a sexist society both presences and absences [of women in film] may not be immediately discernible to the ordinary spectator, if only because certain representations appear to be quite ordinary and obvious, then the fundamental project of feminist film analysis can be said to centre on making visible the invisible. (71)

So, I write from the perspective of cultural studies and poststructuralist feminist theory to interrogate not only apparently “ordinary and obvious” *representations* of women in horror, but *expressions* of gynaehorror, be they aesthetic, thematic or narrative, and their practical implications.

My second and third contributions are reciprocal and complementary: I explore and test alternative paradigms for the study of women in horror, and I consider what the study of horror films might in turn offer to these models and areas of study, especially as some of these are not self-evident matches with the genre. Horror’s fixation upon the body and selfhood is helpful in that the genre can expose the limitations of the ways that we think about women’s bodies, while simultaneously exploring alternative understandings of and challenging dominant notions of corporeality, sexuality and subjectivity. I offer background and justification for this approach in my opening chapter, “(Re)conceptions”, and beginning with genre theorist Robin Wood’s seminal 1978 article “Return of the Repressed” I provide an overview of some of the ongoing debates in modern horror scholarship, particularly as they pertain to the study of women in horror. As I have indicated, what is quickly obvious in any audit of this area of study is the ongoing prominence of psychoanalytic models of interpretation, be they explicitly deployed (through the application of Freudian and Marcusean theories of repression, Lacanian and Kleinian models of identity formation or Kristevan theories of abjection), or more implicitly endorsed. This is particularly notable within the study of women in horror. However, I argue that this emphasis on psychoanalytic theories and interpretive practices is problematic, in part because the heterosexism inherent to the traditional, phallogentric psychoanalytic paradigm has a profound impact upon the manner in which issues of gender and power are interpreted. Further, I suggest that this dominance has created a restrictive theoretical and

discursive space that has not always responded well to the introduction or the co-application of alternative methodologies.

Certainly, debates over the veracity of such psychodynamic approaches, which have arguably flourished better in the field of horror than anywhere else in film studies, have become a key part of the discursive landscape. For instance, Stephen Jay Schneider (“Psychoanalysis in / and / of the Horror Film”) insists that psychoanalysis and horror are so irrevocably bound up together that this theoretical model must be (and remain) a key aspect of horror scholarship, while others such as film scholar Stephen Prince (“Psychoanalytic Film Theory and the Problem of the Missing Spectator”; “Dread, Taboo and *The Thing*”), cultural theorist Andrew Tudor (“Why Horror?”) and cognitive philosopher Cynthia A. Freeland (“Feminist Frameworks for Horror Films”) have each notably expressed dis-ease at such a prospect. Instead, I concur with Pamela Craig and Martin Fradley, who in 2010 suggested that Creed’s and Clover’s pieces, while perhaps fit for purpose at the time of writing, are “more often than not inadequate to deal with the generic terrain of contemporary American horror cinema” (80), let alone those from other territories. I also share Matt Hills’ weariness, expressed in his 2004 article “Doing Things with Theory”, with what can be framed, bluntly, as ongoing academic turf wars between those arguing from a psychoanalytic perspective and those who advocate for a sociocultural approach to the genre, often to the relative exclusion of the other. Instead, Hills encourages performative theorisation: the action of applying theory to the horror genre such that it intertextually increases the genre’s cultural value (214).

So, in this introductory chapter – and throughout this thesis – I advocate for an expansion of horror’s theoretical ‘toolbox’ through a (re)consideration of the opportunities presented not just by alternative theories of horror, but by the active theorisation *of* and *with* horror. To provide an example of this – or, perhaps, a ‘proof of concept’ – I open such a theoretical debate by looking at the way women’s bodies are conceptualised spatially within critical feminist theory. Through a discussion of the relationship between bodies, houses and interior space in *Demon Seed* (Cammell US 1977) and *Rosemary’s Baby* (Polanski US 1968)<sup>1</sup> – the latter of which is, perhaps, the

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<sup>1</sup> A note on citation: to provide geographical and cultural context for films and to emphasise that they are texts in their own right, I cite films by their director(s), country (or countries) of origin and year of release. A full filmography is presented at the end of this thesis, before the bibliography, and details have been sourced from the Internet Movie Database (IMDB.com).



best-known and most studied gynaehorror – I demonstrate not only that alternative theoretical frameworks can and should be applied to horror film, but that the study of horror film can, in turn, both highlight limitations and open up new areas of inquiry within those frameworks. My successive chapters continue this exploration by following the normative and culturally sanctioned trajectory of a woman's sexual maturation, from these initial fundamental considerations of the space of the body, to first sex, to pregnancy – with a consideration of both termination of pregnancy and the conception of life outside the body – and then to motherhood. I finish by exploring how to radically reconsider reproductive bodies.<sup>2</sup>

In my second chapter, “Roses and Thorns”, I examine the ways in which the horror genre expresses a fascination with female sexuality. It is telling that in his 2012 book *Horror and the Horror Film* Bruce F. Kawin regularly focuses his attention on a trope that, in his index, he calls the ‘unconscious woman’ or ‘the monster and the girl’, which features the merging of sex, desire and voyeurism (by both characters and the viewer) with horror. Very early in the book he highlights a scene from the B-movie *Tarantula* (Arnold US 1955) in which the eponymous giant spider voyeuristically spies on the vulnerable, normatively attractive heroine undressing in her bedroom and it becomes so excited and agitated that it destroys her house (20-1) – a representative account of a gendered power dynamic that recurs throughout the genre. Certainly, this is an obvious relationship in the slasher subgenre. As Andrew Welsh demonstrates in his intensive 2010 quantitative study of sex and violence in slasher films, women in such films are far more likely to fall prey to eroticised violence than men, and women

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<sup>2</sup> I have not addressed two areas that would logically fit into this progression: firstly, menstruation and secondly, menopause and the aging body. This omission is deliberate and is due solely to limitations of space. Menstruation has been frequently acknowledged as a site of horror, such as in Barbara Creed's analysis of the 1976 film *Carrie* in chapter six of *The Monstrous-Feminine*, as well as in more recent work, like Aviva Briefel's 2005 article “Monster Pains: Masochism, Menstruation and Identification in the Horror Film” and April Miller's 2005 article ““The Hair that Wasn't There Before”: Demystifying Monstrosity and Menstruation in “Ginger Snaps” and “Ginger Snaps Unleashed””. To my knowledge, representations of and allusions to menopause in horror film have received little attention at all. However, the link between the overt presentation of the aging body and the grotesque is evident in Vivian Sobchack's discussion on the ‘terror’ of not being young, “Scary Women: Cinema, Surgery and Special Effects”, in which she refers to the horror comedy *Death Becomes Her*, and in the studies of 1962 camp classic *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?* such as Jodi Brooks' 1992 article “Fascination and the Grotesque”. Incidentally, intergenerational angst and the fear of aging are key themes in season three of the American cable television drama *American Horror Story* (2011-): Fiona Goode (played by 64 year old Jessica Lange), the cruel and narcissistic ‘Supreme’ witch of her coven, is so obsessed with retaining her health, her autonomy and her good looks that she is willing to murder the rest of her coven so that the next Supreme cannot gain ascendancy and thus rob her of her life and powers.

who engage in sexual behaviour in these films are not only more likely to die than their male and female counterparts, but their death scenes are likely to be longer and more explicit. However, the interplay between female victimhood and the overt display of female sexuality is prominent beyond the monster movie and the slasher, for the sexualised woman is present in horror film not only as victim and hero but as monster, as Barbara Creed has discussed in great depth.

To account for and broaden these diverse constructs, in this first chapter I expand this focus on sex and sexuality by drawing from critical theories of heterosexuality to provide a detailed account of the way that taken-for-granted ideas about normative female (hetero)sexuality are articulated, recycled and policed in popular culture. Here I suggest that female sexuality in the horror film is often presented in simplistic, binary terms, which are embodied on one hand by the figures of the virgin hero and the chaste, feminine sacrificial virgin, and on the other by the unbounded sexual threat of the mythical *vagina dentata*, the toothed vagina. Over the course of this chapter I show how these paradigms serve to constrain and simplify broader cultural conceptualisations of female sexuality while nonetheless turning the body of the woman into an object that is either available for (male, masculine hetero-)sexual consumption, or that is deemed disgusting, terrifying and threatening to phallocentric domination. After explicating these themes and aspects of their cinematic and artistic expression, I examine how these constructs co-mingle in a discussion of the 2007 horror-satire *Teeth* (Lichtenstein US 2007), a film in which a chaste young woman discovers that her vagina has teeth. Here, I consider the way that the film critiques the sort of facile, restrictive understandings of female sexuality that are propagated through American sexual education programmes that emphasise abstinence over sexual awareness. Given this chapter's emphasis upon heterosexuality, I close with a brief discussion about the dearth of lesbian characters in horror film.

In the following two chapters I move from critical sexualities to theories of subjectivity, an area of profound relevance to horror given the genre's interest in the nature of the boundary between 'self' and 'other'. In chapter three, "The Lady Vanishes", I focus on pregnancy, abortion and foetal imagery. I begin by outlining a key problem in the conceptualisation of subjectivity: the historic construction of the ideal subject of western philosophy is that of an in-divisible 'whole' individual who is implicitly male,

young, fit, healthy and white. Clearly this sits at odds with the state of pregnancy, in which a woman moves from 'one', then 'more-than-one', to a forever changed 'one'. So, I consider the way that feminist philosophers Iris Marion Young (1980's "Pregnant Embodiment", republished in 1990), Christine Battersby (1998's *The Phenomenal Woman*) and Imogen Tyler (2000's "Reframing Pregnant Embodiment") have each accounted for alternative pregnant subject positions or reconfigured dominant modes of subjectivity. At the outset of my research I had hoped to find that the fleshy corporeality of the horror genre was a place in which alternative modes of being and subjectivity could be explored and considered. However, in the case of pregnancy, I discuss how horror film instead sets up a strong oppositional relationship between the pregnant woman and the foetus inside her, both narratively and aesthetically. I explore how this schema has been popularly exacerbated through the ongoing development of foetal imaging technologies, which allow the foetus itself to be considered as an autonomous entity that exists in competition with its mother.

Roman Polanski's 1968 film *Rosemary's Baby* is one of the best examples of the dilemma of the pregnant subject in horror: its protagonist, Rosemary, is impregnated by a demonic presence after her husband secretly barter her body away to a group of Satanists so that his acting career may prosper. Rosemary acts as the vessel for the Antichrist, and much of the film centres on the tension between the physical and emotional violation of Rosemary-as-subject, her role as unwitting maternal host and the needs of the gestating foetus. However, given the film's dominance in studies on pregnancy and horror, I deliberately move beyond *Rosemary's Baby* to broaden the field of inquiry through a consideration of films that may have been neglected or under-theorised. Instead, I interrogate how the pregnant body is positioned and imagined, and the manner in which the pregnant subject herself becomes abstracted in religious and ecological horror films such as *The Reaping* (Hopkins US 2007) and *Prophecy* (Frankenheimer US 1979) respectively. I go on to discuss the French film *Inside (À l'intérieur)* (Bustillo and Maury FR 2007), in which a heavily pregnant woman is terrorised in her home by a mysterious woman who wants to cut out the child, which is itself featured as a computer generated *in utero* subject. Finally I consider the issue of abortion and the horrific representation of aborted fetuses, a subject that is conspicuous by its near-absence in Anglophone horror film. I close with a comparative

discussion of the self-proclaimed 'pro-life' American horror film *The Life Zone* (Weber US 2011) and the one hour standalone episode of American cable television horror anthology *Masters of Horror*, "Pro-Life" (Carpenter US 2007), which is set in an abortion clinic that is under siege by both anti-abortion activists and a demonic presence. Both demonstrate how the presentation of abortion in American horror, at least, is irrevocably tied into abortion politics, and I analyse how I show how each film comes to treat the subjectivity of the pregnant woman in profoundly different ways.

In chapter four, "Not of Woman Born", I continue my discussion of subjectivity by shifting from the 'embodied' states of pregnancy and abortion to a consideration of 'disembodied' reproduction, that is, the way that the reproductive female body is compromised, elided or eliminated altogether in horror films about reproductive technology. Reproductive technologies such as *in vitro* fertilisation are inevitably presented as ambivalent: while they offer a great deal of promise for women who have problems conceiving naturally, they also inhabit a space marked by corporeal and ethical ambiguity, and as such they are a rich source of horror. This dis-ease is particularly apparent in 'mad science' narratives, stories like that of Victor Frankenstein and his monster, which explore the creation of life – from conception and sometimes through to gestation – outside the body of the woman and, thus, outside of the 'natural order'. Here I recall chapter two's discussion of heterosexuality, for 'mad science' narratives situate reproduction within a conceptual schema that is structured with regards to the historic association of science with masculinity and nature and the fallible, imperfect body with femininity. So, science itself is an explicitly gendered act of domination and dominion; as Susan Bordo attests, historically "The project that fell to both empirical science and "rationalism" was to tame the female universe" (111). Given this association of science with masculinity, I consider the rare figure of the female mad scientist, especially as she is presented in the science fiction horror film *Splice* (Natali CAN-FR-US 2009), before looking to the possibility of alternative models of female subjectivity through the potentially emancipatory figure of the cyborg.

In the fifth chapter, "The Monstrous Maternal", I acknowledge that mothers and motherhood have been areas of fascination in the horror film, something evidenced by Barbara Creed's focus on the maternal the first half of her book *The Monstrous-Feminine*, as well as her discussion, later in that book, of the film *Psycho* (Hitchcock US 1960) and

the figure she terms the 'castrating mother'. However, I move away from Creed's psychoanalytic terrain and my earlier discussion of the philosophical construction of the body and the pregnant subject to consider how motherhood is discursively constructed in horror film. I suggest that a focus on the archetypes of the self-sacrificing 'good' mother and the monstrous 'bad' mother in horror film, particularly as they have been formulated in studies of motherhood in the maternal melodrama such as Sarah Arnold's recent book *Maternal Horror Film*, fail to acknowledge how complex the discourses of maternal horror are. Instead, I argue that horror films (as cultural artefacts) are good indicators of how competing and shifting discourses of motherhood are expressed and challenged in popular culture. In particular, I argue that films that deal with the monstrous maternal express ambiguity and anxiety over two dominant constructs of motherhood. The first, 'essential' motherhood, is the notion that motherhood is a biological and emotional necessity that sits at the heart of the female experience. The second, 'ideal' motherhood, is the imperative for women to mother in culturally, socially and historically specific and sanctioned ways. To demonstrate this I consider how a cluster of films from the 1970s actively recycles simplistic, popularly received understandings of the mother in Freudian psychoanalysis, while films from the early 2000s focus on the fallibility of the (single) mother and the pressures that are experienced and expressed due to the sheer impossibility of fulfilling the criteria of ideal motherhood.

Finally, in chapter six, "(Re)productive Becomings", I move towards a radical theoretical re-appraisal of the nature of bodies and power. Here I look to the work of French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, in particular the practice of 'schizoanalysis', a challenge to psychoanalysis that they outline in their 1980 book *A Thousand Plateaus*, which is the second volume of their *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* project and a follow up to 1972's *Anti-Oedipus*. Certainly, work has been done in this area: Anna Powell's 2005 book *Deleuze and Horror Film* ably demonstrates that an approach that looks to the aesthetics of horror and the experience of film viewing deserves greater attention, including as it relates to Deleuze's solo work on the nature of time and image in cinema, and she further develops these thoughts in her 2007 book *Deleuze, Altered States and Film*. I acknowledge her exploratory work on the application of schizoanalysis to horror, as well as her deployment of Deleuzoguattarian concepts

such as the 'Body without Organs', and I develop this project extensively through a close-grained reading of the *Alien* series – *Alien* (Scott UK-US 1979), *Aliens* (Cameron UK-US 1986), *Alien<sup>3</sup>* (Fincher US 1992) and *Alien: Resurrection* (Jeunet US 1997) – all films that are acutely concerned with the nature of sex, reproduction and the self. I argue that this theoretical model is an ideal way to consider horror film, in part because of its emphasis upon the dynamic process of 'becoming' rather than the static state of 'being', and because its interest in expression, interaction and affect encourages thinking that does not rely on strict representation. So, over the course of these six chapters, in addition to providing a broad appraisal of gynaehorror as both subgenre and thematic concern, I indicate what potential there is for horror scholarship that looks beyond dominant psychoanalytic modes of inquiry. This thesis, then, is both an acknowledgement of the essential theoretical groundwork and debate that has formed the corpus of modern horror scholarship since the late 1970s, and a hopeful and celebratory look at the potential offered by an enthusiastic embrace of diverse alternative ways of thinking about bodies, power, sex and monstrosity in the horror genre.

While I anchor each chapter with detailed readings of key films, my filmography is broad, and it is important to consider the implications of my criteria for inclusion. While I have not intended to provide a wholesale survey of reproductive horror, I have nonetheless cast my net wide so as to be able to make some relatively broad claims. I have been flexible with my appraisal of what does and does not constitute a horror film; after all, as genre theorist Steve Neale has noted, "water-tight definitions" of horror are hard to come by (85) beyond the imperative "to horrify" (86). I have taken the designation of 'horror' to refer to films that can be easily generically categorised as such, or that self-identify as belonging to the horror genre. In places I have also looked to 'genre films' – that is, B-movies or exploitation films<sup>3</sup> – that contain horrific content, scenes or themes of reproductive horror or expressions monstrous of female sexuality, be they aesthetic, narrative or thematic.

My approach has been inclusive and populist. I acknowledge that culture – as practice, as process and as cultural artefact – is a dynamic space of meaning-making,

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<sup>3</sup> The American Genre Film Archive, for instance, focuses on "exploitation era of independent cinema – the 1960s through the 1980s" ("About AGFA").

contestation, and ideological struggle, a “participatory activity, in which people create their societies and identities” (Kellner, *Media Culture* 2). Films have not been selected on the basis of critical reception; indeed, a good number of the films I discuss in this thesis have been widely critically panned and represent the sort of filmmaking and content that has contributed historically to what genre theorist Robin Wood called the horror film’s ‘disreputable’ status (*Hollywood* 29-30). While some films have proven themselves to be richer veins of gynaehorror than others, I have endeavoured not to reinforce explicit and implicit hegemonic hierarchies of taste, nor to cast a distinction between the scholarly value of so-called ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture. As a genre, horror also lends itself well to such a consideration, for as Ian Conrich remarks in his introduction to *Horror Zone: The Cultural Experience of Contemporary Horror*, “Such is the cross appeal of a core of contemporary horror that it can cater for both a subculture and the mainstream” (3). I also draw from a wide variety of popular sources; for instance, in chapter two, I look to popular constructions and representations of virginity and female sexuality found in pornography, fine art, American in-school abstinence programmes and urban legends spread by American soldiers. This is important to my broader analysis because popular films do not exist in a cultural vacuum; much as ‘low-brow’ and ‘high-brow’ films can be analysed alongside one another, it is important that films are considered (and contextualised) against other forms of cultural praxis.

I have also deliberately looked beyond films that have achieved ‘canonical’ status, so that while I recognise and sometimes challenge dominant readings of films that are frequently cited or analysed, such as *Rosemary’s Baby*, *The Brood* (Cronenberg CAN 1979) and *Psycho*, I also engage with a variety of films that have not received significant scholarly attention, such as *The Killing Kind* (Harrington US 1973), *Demon Seed*, *Prophecy*, *The Unborn* (Flender US 1991), *Grace* (Solet US-CAN 2009), *Triangle* (Smith UK-AUS 2009), *Teeth*, *The Life Zone* and *Inside (À l’intérieur)*. In some ways my criteria has been very prosaic: is this a film that I, as a fan of the genre, am able to acquire and view? So, while I do not consider myself an ‘ideal viewer’, I do wish to acknowledge the breadth of cinema that is easily available to the enthusiastic English-speaking audience, while also paying heed to the transnational flows that exist within contemporary film viewership, let alone filmmaking itself.

This issue of transnational context is an important one, and one that recurs throughout this thesis. It is important to note that the films to which I refer are almost entirely Anglophone and predominantly made in the United States, although some come from other English-speaking countries and some from Europe.<sup>4</sup> While I have not deliberately sought out American films, this focus is, perhaps (and, possibly, debatably), unavoidable. Film scholar Steffan Hantke is worth quoting at length:

Even though the horror genre has been fed by tributaries from many national literary traditions ... and even though horror cinema has prospered and developed its unique forms of expression in many film industries around the globe, it is in the United States and the American film industry that horror, for as long as cinema itself has existed, has been a staple genre... ("Introduction" vii)

As such, while studying horror film in the manner that I do in this thesis, it is important to provide a great deal of consideration to American theories of genre and horror, and to the sorts of scholarly debates that have centred on American film, or that have situated American horror at the centre of a broader Anglophone film tradition.

However, while the American film industry, particularly the Hollywood system, has been profoundly influential on global and genre cinema, these flows are not one way. There is now a broad range of films that come from complimentary communities of film makers that are no longer – if they have ever truly been – bounded by strict geographical borders. Christina Klein, writing in 2010, points out the way that genre films are open to transnationalisation and can be easily localised (3-4). She also indicates that Hollywood is now a global industry, not just an American one, and its most successful films make more money outside of the United States than they do domestically (4). Klein goes on to argue that:

the national and cultural identity of many contemporary horror films is increasingly open to question... This question of cultural identity extends, of course, beyond the realm of genre films and into questions about audiences

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<sup>4</sup> The exclusion of horror films from other territories, such as the burgeoning South East Asian horror industry is both practical and theoretical: it is due to my own ignorance about these film traditions, and the pronounced difference in the history of gender and feminist studies and theories in these areas. This sort of broad transnational study of horror and gender, while a fruitful area, is beyond the scope of this thesis; see Higbee and Lim's "Concepts of Transnational Cinema" for a discussion on some of the potential areas of study and debate in transnational film studies. For work done in this area, see chapter three of Sarah Arnold's *Maternal Horror Film* for a cogent comparative analysis of Japanese horror films about motherhood and their American remakes.



and national culture more generally, all of which are becoming less culturally coherent. (12)

Further, while Hollywood expands its production and business model into foreign markets, so too do international filmmakers come to Hollywood – as they always have done. One example is French director Alexandre Aja, whose film *Haute Tension* (FR-IT-ROM 2003) I discuss at the close of chapter two. He cites American horror directors Wes Craven, John Carpenter and Tobe Hooper as key influences in his work, indicating that he “grew up with [their] films” (“Exclusive Interview: Alexandra Aja (High Tension)”) in France. French horror cinema lacks legitimacy in its own country (“Interview with Pascal Laugier”) and it is telling that, according to box office reporting service Box Office Mojo, *Haute Tension* drew significantly higher box office takings in US cinemas than it did everywhere else combined (“High Tension (2005) - Box Office Mojo”), suggesting that despite its French origins the film appealed to American audiences far more than in other territories, both in terms of the manner in which it was distributed and the actual number of tickets sold. Beyond Aja’s explicit positioning of *Haute Tension* within a broader ‘American’ horror tradition (rather than with regards to its potential relationship to the French gothic or *cinéma fantastique*) the question of whether or not such a film is truly and wholly ‘French’ becomes muddled, especially as the film was co-produced in Italy and Romania. This is complicated further, as Aja went on to helm a 2006 American remake of Wes Craven’s 1977 film *The Hills Have Eyes* as well as an English language remake of a South Korean horror film (*Mirrors* (US-GER-SPA-ROM-FR 2008), from *Geoul Sokeuro / Into the Mirror* (Kim KOR 2003)). As Tony Perrello puts it in his analysis of Aja’s work within the context of horror and transnational cinema, “A Parisian in Hollywood”, Aja “provides the supreme example of the cross-cultural nature of contemporary horror, which seems to have entered the global marketplace as an exotic newcomer with hopes of making it its present home” (16).

So, I wish to indicate that this issue of cultural context in horror analysis is by no means straightforward, especially when considering films through the lens of cultural studies, but that the inclusions and exclusions, as well as the choice of methodologies, have been deliberately considered. With that in mind it is also important to situate myself within this analysis for, as David Church indicates in his afterword to *American Horror Film: The Genre at the Turn of the Millennium*, “situational contortions ... can be as much inspired by our personal self-histories as the misleadingly linear conceptions of

generic history we are inclined to interpret" (239). That is, we project our own "remembered personal histories" (240) with genre upon an oversimplified and linear narrative on genre, for:

As a discursive entity, the [horror] genre is partially constructed by our subjectivities, just as the genre itself partially constructs our subjectivities – hence our ever-threatened desire to make chronological sense of the genre based on concepts like "authenticity" and "originality". (240)

While the films (and other popular texts) I discuss are "historically specific fragments" (Church 240) they are still woven into a broader narratives. So, while I, as a female Pākehā New Zealander with a life-long affection for the genre, watch films within what could be considered an international or transnational context (as well as within a community of enthusiastic fellow horror fans, both online and in person), I am nonetheless aware that these films cannot be wholly divorced from their means of production and the cultural and political climate in which they were created. But, nor can I remove my analysis from my own situation and from the act of spectatorship, and where appropriate I have highlighted these concerns.<sup>5</sup> While it is true that "Horror films are presented and received in a heterogenous manner" (Conrich 3), I acknowledge popular culture theorist Joshua Gamson, who states that "Pop culture is a common currency" (27), a place from which diverse populations and groups may find commonalities – and this thesis is a collection of such commonalities.

Finally, it is worth highlighting one glaring limitation. While I have tried to offer a representative account of this subgenre, what I have not done is offer a representative account of women. It has become painfully obvious over the course of writing this thesis that the women featured in the horror genre are not a diverse set. In terms of racial (lack of) representation, casts in Anglophone and European contributions to the genre are disproportionally white. I have been mindful of this as I have sourced the films used in this thesis, but this does not alter the fact that of the many films included in the filmography – not all of which are discussed in detail – only a small number feature people of colour at all, let alone women in leading roles, and it is important to note that I do not address issues of race and whiteness in any meaningful way. Further, the women

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<sup>5</sup> See also Joan Hawkins' "Culture Wars: Some New Trends in Art Horror" and Chuck Kleinhans' "Cross-cultural Disgust: Some Problems in the Analysis of Contemporary Horror Cinema", both of which outline some of the cultural 'blind spots' that occur in transnational film criticism.

and the relationships in these films are also overwhelmingly heterosexual. The pathologisation of so-called sexual deviancy features in Carol J. Clover's formulation of the slasher killer in *Men, Women, and Chain Saws* and, more recently, in work such as Kent L. Britnall's 2004 article "Re-building Sodom and Gomorrah: the monstrosity of queer desire in the horror film". The potential for positive queer representation in and readings of horror has received attention from scholars such as Harry M. Benshoff in his 1997 book *Monsters in the Closet*, and is considered in great depth in studies of recent horror television shows such as *True Blood* (US 2008-; such as Dhaenens) and *American Horror Story* (US 2011-; such as T. Taylor), each of which prominently feature a diverse range of queer individuals and relationships, and which demonstrate a distinctly camp sensibility. However, this is not something I engage with beyond my discussion of lesbians in horror film at the close of chapter two. Finally, more often than not, the women in these films are middle class, whether or not they have any further degree of social, political, economic or personal agency. So, I suggest, that the narratives about women, sex and reproduction in these films reflect a bias that I highlight in chapter five; in the discursive construction of ideal motherhood, this 'ideal mother' is invariably white, straight and (upper) middle class. My discussions here, then, reflect a certain *type* of woman, sexual practice and femininity – a problematic hegemonic construct that is naturalised and widely circulated.

Gérard Lenne's contemptuous dismissal of women in horror as either screaming victims or "spoil-sport[s]" (35), with which I open this introduction, has most certainly been shown to be simplistic and inaccurate, but the scope of the work in the field that has emerged in the last 35 years is, in some cases, quite outdated, and is certainly in need of expansion. Over the next six chapters, I will demonstrate not only that there is a great deal more to feminist horror scholarship than is offered by psychoanalytic perspectives, but also that enthusiastic, rigorous and exploratory theoretical work is both valid and conceptually fruitful from the twin perspectives of horror studies and critical theory.

## CHAPTER ONE: (RE)CONCEPTIONS

### THEORISING WOMEN IN HORROR

*An evil old house, the kind some people call haunted, is like an undiscovered country waiting to be explored.*

Dr John Markaway, paranormal researcher, in *The Haunting* (Wise UK-US 1963)

*We know less about the sexual life of little girls than of boys. But we need not feel ashamed of this distinction; after all, the sexual life of adult women is a 'dark continent' for psychology.*

Sigmund Freud, "The Question of Lay Analysis", *The Essentials of Psycho-Analysis* (32)

This chapter provides a theoretical and historical overview of the study of horror film, in particular the study of women in horror film. Modern scholarship in horror cinema, which emerged in the late 1970s (Gledhill, "The Horror Film" 347), drew primarily from psychoanalytic film theory, and variations on this theoretical framework have since remained a dominant voice in horror scholarship. While alternative frameworks have been posited, in particular, sociologically-driven accounts of the genre, none have retained the degree of authoritativeness that psychoanalysis has displayed. In this chapter I argue that the ongoing reliance on and refining of 'mainstream' Lacanian and Marcusean psychoanalytic perspectives is a limiting rather than a progressive theme in horror scholarship. Instead, I advocate for an expansion of the theoretical repertoire of the horror scholar – that is, for an enthusiastic exploration of alternative frameworks that draw from a variety of theoretical positions, rather than the consolidation of one 'true' or conclusive methodology. In doing so, the analysis of horror films can contribute to wider understandings of the expression, construction and

representation of the female and the feminine, as well as broader political feminist concerns, just as the analysis of women in horror can provide a critical perspective on the horror genre itself. To offer an example of the potential of this sort of theoretical exploration, this chapter closes with a discussion of the way that two key gynae horror films, *Rosemary's Baby* (Polanski US 1968) and *Demon Seed* (Cammell US 1977), engage with dominant constructions of feminine corporeality through an analysis of the relationship between the films' protagonists and their houses.

Rigorous theoretical appraisal of the horror film is a comparatively recent phenomenon, "despite a long standing intellectual interest in horror in France and elsewhere in Europe" (Neale 93) where the horror genre was situated within the *fantastique* and linked with surrealism (Gledhill, "The Horror Film" 345). While film genre criticism itself emerged in the mid 1960s, it was then dominated by discussions of the Western and gangster film (Gledhill, "Introduction" 252). Until the late 1970s, scholarly studies of the horror film had focussed on individual films or clusters of films, sometimes with reference to the literary Gothic or German Expressionism, with few works dealing with horror as a broader, coherent and cohesive genre worthy of study in its own right. Popular accounts of the genre, such as Dennis Gifford's *A Pictorial History of Horror Films* (1973), have focussed on narrative histories of the genre, while other discussions have had a tendency towards an analysis of "classic" films, rather than contemporary; Carlos Clarens' *An Illustrated History of the Horror Film* (1968), and Ivan Butler's *Horror in the Cinema* (1970) were the first to make the claim that the horror film could be considered art. Complicating this is the fact that many films which are now considered seminal horror texts, such as *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (Weine GER 1920), have been 're-classified' as horror films, so that horror has come to appropriate what may have, at their creation, been called fantasies, Gothic stories or 'tales of terror' (Jancovich, "General Introduction" 7-8).

The transgressive content and alleged disreputability of the horror film, as well as its historic critical positioning as low-brow entertainment, have contributed to this late start. Further, early critical analysis of the 'modern' horror<sup>6</sup> has been coloured by a

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<sup>6</sup> It is difficult to provide a clear date for the shift from the 'classical' to the 'modern' periods (which would perhaps be more accurately termed the modernist and the postmodern eras of horror film respectively). Peter Hutchings singles out *Psycho* (Hitchcock US 1960) and *Night of the Living Dead* (Romero US 1968) and *Rosemary's Baby* (Polanski US 1960) as films that are frequently identified by theorists (Waller 2) as

perpetual sense of “a genre in decline” (Jancovich, “General Introduction” 9), so that early horror films, such as Universal monster movies from the 1930s and 1940s, and then independent and art house horrors of the 1960s and early 1970s were privileged over films such as those from the British Hammer Film Productions horror stable, exploitation films and, later, American slasher films and horror franchises of the 1980s.<sup>7</sup> As such, there has been a tendency to presume that, as Mark Jancovich puts it, modern “horror is moronic, sick and worrying”, as well as inherently dangerous and deviant, and that there is therefore something wrong with people who like horror (and, presumably, those theorists who engage with horror as fans) (“General Introduction” 18). This is echoed in Carol J. Clover’s discussion of the slasher film, a subgenre that began in the late 1970s, was prolific in the 1980s and then re-emerged in the mid 1990s; writing in 1992, she compares her own enjoyment of the genre with broader accusations that slasher films are “trash” (*Men, Women, and Chain Saws* 21) and “vile piece[s] of sick crap” (*Men, Women, and Chain Saws* 22). Nonetheless, serious appraisal of the horror genre emerged in the late 1970s, and an early emphasis on psychoanalytic theory has had a profound effect upon the direction of studies of the genre.

## HORROR AND PSYCHOANALYSIS

Much contemporary horror film scholarship, be it textual analysis, the examination of monstrosity or a broader consideration of the appeal of horror, has been explicitly informed by psychoanalytic theories. As Andrew Tudor has noted, “This psychoanalytic emphasis is not recent - though the Lacanian turn in cultural theory has lent it additional force - and it is tempting to speculate as to why, more than with any other popular genre, those puzzled by horror should so often have turned to

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watershed moments in the development of the modern horror, in part due to their rejection of the European gothic. Similarly, in her 1997 book *Recreational Terror* Isabel Cristina Pinedo suggests 1968 can be considered the beginning of the ‘postmodern’ era (cf. the ‘classical’ era) of horror film (10). However, Hutchings wonders whether these films are more “isolated outposts of activity rather than like the actual beginning of anything” and argues that a “regular flow of the American horror does not develop until the mid-1970s” (172).

<sup>7</sup> This sense of decline has continued – see Steffan Hantke (“Introduction”) for a pointed discussion about the “general malaise” (xii) regarding the state of the horror film that wryly indicates that bemoaning generational change and the current crop of horror films has always been something of a pastime for horror fans and scholars. He suggests that this ongoing lack of “meta-awareness” (xiv) about the very nature of the American film industry (and its commercial interest in sequels, remakes, canonisation and the importation of foreign directors and properties) is perhaps a failing on the part of scholars’ genre historiographies, not the films themselves.

psychoanalysis in search of enlightenment” (447). Undoubtedly, some horror films such as Alfred Hitchcock’s 1960 film *Psycho* and other such psychological horrors draw knowingly from popular accounts of psychoanalytic theory because of the way that the film links sex, violence and parental trauma – something that I consider in chapter five of this thesis. Tudor suggests that here the horror film’s “typical monsters have been compulsive murderers, as so often in the past thirty years [dating from 1997], the genre’s common presumption has been of a psychopathology rooted in the psychosexual dynamics of childhood” (447). However, this is a very broad-stroke and reductive account of a wide and varied genre.

The dominance of psychoanalytic approaches to horror has been directly influenced by British-born Canadian film critic Robin Wood, whose seminal 1978 article “Return of the Repressed” marks one of the first contemporary critical and theoretical appraisals of the American horror film.<sup>8</sup> In it, he explores a possible overarching theory of the horror film and its pleasures that draws explicitly from psychological and psychoanalytic frameworks. He suggests that there is a strong connection between films and dreams, noting that “losing oneself in the fantasy-experience” (25) is integral to the film-watching experience. As such, films are not always purely escapist, but like dreams can house more nuanced and complicated meanings than at first apparent. Thus, “seemingly innocuous genre movies can be far more radical and fundamentally undermining than works of solid conscious criticism” (26) in that (like dreams) they allow a subconscious resolution of tension that would not necessarily be ‘allowed’ by critical, conscious thought. Given their dream-like nature, Wood asserts that popular films “respond to interpretation as at once the personal dreams of their makers and the collective dreams of the audience” (26). However, in the American horror film, Wood argues that this cinematic dream becomes a nightmare through the repression of something that is deemed to be loathsome, and something that constitutes a serious threat.

Wood sees the horror film, and this cinematic nightmare, as fulfilling a broader societal function. Drawing from Freud’s workings on ‘basic’ or ‘necessary’ repression

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<sup>8</sup> Wood went on to present expanded versions of this essay in the first contemporary anthology of horror studies, 1979’s *The American Nightmare: Essays on the American Horror Film* (Wood and Lippe), and in Wood’s own *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan* (1986) (and a 2003 expanded and revised version of the same). In *Hollywood*, he cushions this discussion in an overall appraisal of 1970s American horror, then moves on to individual directors and then the 1980s in later chapters.

(which he argues is essential to the survival of the individual), and Herbert Marcuse's Marxist notions of culturally-specific 'surplus' repression (which exists to ensure social control and to help consolidate the power of the privileged classes), Wood notes that "in a society built on monogamy and family there will be an enormous amount of sexual energy that will have to be repressed" – and that "that which is repressed must always strive to return" (27). This psychosexual threat can take many forms: it can consist of the 'inner savage' or bestial hybrids in transformation films such as *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (Mamoulian US 1931), *The Wolf Man* (Waggner US 1941) and *The Island of Dr Moreau* (Taylor US 1977) and their various remakes, or the threat of burgeoning female sexuality or outright promiscuity in myriad slasher horrors, or the hovering spectre of the incest taboo in *Halloween* (Carpenter US 1978). The danger of the bad dream is taken to its (il)logical end point in *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (Craven US 1984), in which child murderer Freddy Kruger, killed (that is, suppressed) by a lynch mob of angry parents, returns to plague their teenage children through their dreams. The film's shock ending (which paved the way for numerous sequels) suggests that far from being defeated by the film's hero Nancy, or strictly confined to the unconscious or subconscious, Freddy can exert power over the elastic boundary between sleep and wakefulness, for he is increasingly able to extend his murderous influence to the 'real' world.

Wood considers this return as firmly embedded in the narrative structure of the American horror film. He sees the basic formula of the horror film as a combination of three variables – a Monster, normality, and (most importantly) the relationship between the two. The Monster is changeable and reflects society's ills and fears, and the relationship between Monster and normality changes in a "long process of clarification or revelation" (26). Importantly, he sees the most privileged form of this relationship in Western culture to be that of the *doppelgänger*, the uncanny double. Such an alter ego, he argues, is often the subsumed, repressed, or forbidden shape of the protagonist in early horror films such as the various incarnations of Dr. Jekyll, Mr. Hyde, and Dr. Frankenstein and his monster, or Dr. Mirakle and Erik the Ape from *Murders in the Rue Morgue* (Florey US 1932); thus, "the doppelganger [sic] reveals itself as normality's shadow" (26). The appearance of the *doppelgänger* inevitably arises from some sort of psychosexual tension or change in the family, such as a marriage or a new child; indeed



Wood sees the American horror film, since the 1960s, to be structured almost entirely around the family unit. Where older horror films tended to look at horror as 'from without' – for instance, by featuring monsters and villains as foreign (and often played by European actors who, in some cases, had very limited English), or as from another world – "since *Psycho*, the Hollywood cinema has implicitly recognised horror as American and familial" (30). Because of this, Wood says, "the release of sexuality in the horror film is always presented as perverted, monstrous as excessive" (31-2). Wood argues that this monstrous release of sexuality both as the logical outcome of repression and the hallmark of modern horror film.

While Wood is speaking specifically to the American horror film (*Hollywood 70*), his comments have been considered within a much wider framework, perhaps because of the increasingly globalised nature of film production, the ease with which films may be accessed in foreign markets and the global dominance of American (in particular, Hollywood) films. Certainly, the role of the family in American horror has been widely considered; Tony Williams' aforementioned *Hearths of Darkness* and Vivian Sobchack's article "Bringing It All Back Home: Family Economy and Generic Exchange" both offer two excellent appraisals in this area. In addition, familial horror is not limited to the United States: it is a key trope of horror that is found in films across the world. As a brief European and Anglophone sample, within the last ten years *Calvaire* (Du Welz BEL-FR-LUX 2004), *The Children* (Shankland UK 2008), *Frontière(s)* (Gens FR-SWI 2007), *Sheitan* (Chapiron FR 2006), *Mum and Dad* (Sheil UK 2008), *The Loved Ones* (Byrne AUS 2009) and *Splice* (Natali CAN-FR-US 2009) have all situated their horror squarely within the family, be it a family that is broken through horrific means, or a family that is in some way deeply transgressive or traumatised. However, it would be facile to take from this that familial trauma sits at the heart of *all* horror films. Nor is it the case that Wood's assertions about the American horror film automatically extend beyond the borders of the United States,<sup>9</sup> even though his various discussions firmly (yet, I argue,

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<sup>9</sup> When Wood does look further than the United States he appears to be unimpressed by non-American contributions to the genre. In 2004, in his introduction to *Freud's Worst Nightmare: Psychoanalysis and the Horror Film*, Wood asks:

Are significant horror films being made outside America? in the East? in Italy? I am not qualified to answer this question, though it seems necessary to raise it. The Italian horror films of Bava and Argento have their defenders; the few I have seen struck me as obsessively preoccupied with violence against women, dramatized in particularly grotesque images. One

debatably) frame horror as an *American* genre, a point that I have touched upon in the introduction to this thesis. However, Wood's comments on the return of the repressed have become a cornerstone in the discussion of the contemporary horror film, even though as he later noted, "We never asserted or believed that ours was the only way of looking at horror film... although much of what has been written since appears to accuse us of exactly that" ("Foreword" xiii).

However, as I have suggested earlier, Wood's theorising is also coloured by his own appreciation for the horror films of the 1970s. He frames this decade as a 'Golden Age' of apocalyptic horror film, which he considers to have been radical, progressive and exploratory ("Foreword" xiv), and influenced by a culture of protest. By Wood's reckoning, in the 1970s "the genre acquired – if only for a while and only intermittently – some maturity and artistic integrity as well as a sense of social responsibility" (Hutchings 170), and he considers George A. Romero's 1985 zombie film *Day of the Dead* to be the "last great American horror film" ("Foreword" xvi). In comparison, he considers the horror films of the 1980s to be reactionary and a "hideous perversion of [the horror film's] essential meaning" (*Hollywood* 70), presumably because they do not share the same countercultural spirit as their forebears – even though his points about the *doppelgänger* and psychosexual trauma can be applied as much to the alleged "misogyny, directorial ineptitude and repetitive generic formula" (Hutchings 191) of films in the 1980s and beyond as they are for those in the 1970s. This assumption that there is an "essence" to a genre – or, more pointedly, that a genre *should* do one thing, but not something else – is problematic, especially when, as in Wood's case, one is attempting to offer a broad account of the pleasures of viewing. There is often a degree of slippage and hybridity within genres, and Steve Neale notes in *Genre and Hollywood* that "it is hardly surprising that water-tight definitions [of the horror genre]... are hard to come by" (92) beyond the broad intention of a horror film to horrify the viewer. This is especially so given the sometimes substantial overlap between the horror and science fiction genres, as well as other genres such as adventure and fantasy (92). Rather, Wood is speaking to a particular period and a particular style of American horror film and making universal statements based upon his own generic criteria. However, in doing so he excludes a broad swath of the genre, selectively ignores many of the less successful

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European film perhaps qualifies, though it must be seen as marginal to the genre: Michael Haneke's profoundly disturbing and troubling *Funny Games* (1997). ("Foreword" xvii)

films of the 1970s and maligns the interests and viewing habits of a generation's worth of horror fans, which he implicitly labels as unsophisticated. Because of this, the widespread application of Wood's theorising to films outside of his prescribed cohort is troublesome.

This Freudian approach to psychosexual trauma and repression outlined by Wood has remained dominant in the analysis of the horror film (Neale 98), even though Wood himself was not a proponent of psychoanalytic theories at large, and his analysis draws just as much from sociological considerations as psychoanalytic ones (Hills 212). Stephen Jay Schneider, on the other hand, vehemently defends the use of psychoanalytic tools in the discussion of the horror film, whether they are drawn from Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, Melanie Klein, Carl S. Jung, or other such scholars and thinkers. In the introduction to *Freud's Worst Nightmare: Psychoanalysis and the Horror Film*, he strongly implies that psychoanalysis is not only helpful, but a necessary tool in the understanding of the horror genre. He suggests that despite "vitriolic" criticism of the model – which will be addressed later in this chapter – "the horror genre has continued to see a steady stream of *new* psychoanalytic approaches, as well as new variations on existing ones" (1). He asserts that even if psychoanalysis can be proven to be false at the level of medical-therapeutic practice<sup>10</sup> then its use-value in the analysis of human development remains, and that it is an essential tool with which to look at horror films and subgenres, especially those with linkages to the Gothic (8), given that genre's "obvious correspondences" with psychoanalysis in terms of theme and narrative (6).

## WOMEN, HORROR AND PSYCHOANALYSIS

The study of women in horror has been firmly – and, I argue, problematically – shaped by the dominance of psychoanalytic theories. This is due to the dominance of psychoanalytic modes of engaging with horror, the importance of psychoanalysis in the development of feminist film theory in the 1970s and the prominence of psychoanalysis

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<sup>10</sup> For a strident critique of psychoanalysis and psychotherapy, see ex-psychoanalyst Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson's *Against Therapy: Emotional Tyranny and the Myth of Psychological Healing*. He argues that all psychotherapy, whether or not it is beneficial to the patient, is inherently wrong because the patient-therapist relationship is one that is based on power and that removes the patient's dignity and autonomy. In particular, he interrogates Freud and Jung's practices and labels them unethical and disrespectful of the patient's experiences.

in film theory generally, as well as the dearth of scholarship about women in horror film before these developments. Prior to 1980s, there was little discussion of the role of women and female monstrosity in horror film. Gérard Lenne, who opens the introduction of this thesis, made a rare foray into this area in 1979 in a strikingly sexist work that stated that all great monsters are male and that women are best suited to 'natural' roles as pretty providers and "tearful victim[s]" (35):

... there are very few monstrous and disfigured women in the fantastic, and so much the better. Is it not reasonable that woman, who, in life, is both mother and lover, should be represented by characters that convey the feeling of a sheltering peace? (35)

Following from this inauspicious start, three articles from the 1980s were the first to seriously frame the discussion of women in horror: Linda Williams' 1983 discussion of female horror spectatorship, "When the Woman Looks"; Carol J. Clover's 1987 exploration of spectatorship and gender slippage, "Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film", and Barbara Creed's 1986 *Screen* article "Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection", which is the only one of the three to discuss women with regards to monstrosity, sex and reproduction and, as such, the only core work to deal with gynaehorror. The collective influence of these widely-cited articles, which deal with both women as victims and the framing of the feminine as monstrous (Neale 99), is apparent in the prominent place that they hold in broader collections and readers on the horror genre: the three together comprise the introductory section of Barry Keith Grant's *The Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film* (1996), which is to date the only anthology that deals specifically with gender and horror, and in conjunction with a chapter on homosexuality, they make up the section on gender in Mark Jancovich's 2002 *Horror: A Reader*.<sup>11</sup> Because of this dominance, in conjunction with the narrow theoretical scope of these articles, it is worth considering their content and impact.

Linda Williams' discussion of female spectatorship draws from British film theorist Laura Mulvey's seminal 1975 article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", which in turn draws heavily upon Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis. Mulvey suggests that narrative films objectify women and frame them as passive objects that do

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<sup>11</sup> This dominance is also likely exacerbated by the economic necessities and pressures of academic publishing, for the reprinting of canonised works has a broader commercial appeal, especially when included in collections that are to be pitched as university textbooks (Hantke, "Introduction" xx).

not drive forward the narrative action, and that the image of women offers the film viewer pleasure through scopophilia. She argues that this occurs through the viewer's dual identification with the dominant male actor, who is an active participant at the centre of the film's action, and with the distanced, implicitly male position inhabited by the camera. She famously asserts that women, who both perform and are displayed for the viewer, connote "to-be-looked-at-ness" (40), for the cinematic image of the woman is constrained within a phallogentric system of representation. The attractive yet threatening spectacle of the woman thus invites either a voyeuristic male gaze that distances her and turns her image into a fetish object, or a sadistic gaze that explores and demystifies her difference (and her 'lack') by punishing her or saving her, thus defusing the male gazer's castration anxiety. However, Mulvey's argument is problematic in that it relies on and reinforces a strict heterosexuality, and it implies that the viewer is passive and uncritical. She addresses the issue of active spectatorship, as well as her self-professed love of the melodrama, a genre that focuses on female protagonists, in a follow-up paper, "Afterthoughts on "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" Inspired by *Duel in the Sun*". In this, she considers a Freudian construction of femininity that suppresses 'the active', and states that Hollywood genre films allow female viewers to "rediscover that lost aspect of her sexual identity, the never fully repressed bed-rock of feminine neurosis" (26).

Drawing from Mulvey, Linda Williams considers what the repercussions of this 'to-be looked-at-ness' might be for female protagonists in horror film. She suggests that female viewers turn away from images in horror film because they are given so little to identify with on the screen (15), and that female protagonists in horror film likewise both fail to look and fail to return the male gaze. When a woman *does* look back at the monster in terror – such as Christine staring at the face of the Phantom in *The Phantom of the Opera* (Julian et al. US 1925) (fig. 1.1) – this is not a distanced, voyeuristic gaze that allows her mastery over a potential threat through a controlling look, but rather one that allows the monster to control her by paralysing her with fear. Williams suggests that when a woman looks, her look of horror not only acknowledges the horrific nature of the monster, but also aligns this horror with her own sexual difference and lack (20-1). In this sense, the deformed features of the monster suggest "a distorted mirror-reflection of her own putative lack in the eyes of patriarchy" (25). This offers



**Fig. 1.1 Christine unmasks the Phantom:** after seeing the Phantom's horrific face, Christine falls to the floor in terror. His furious speech, delivered as he roughly drags her face up towards his, is presented through title cards: "Feast your eyes – glut your soul, on my accursed ugliness! Oh, mad Christine, who would not heed my warning!" His is a controlling look: she offers to be his slave if he lets her go (*The Phantom of the Opera*).

more space for activity and subversion than Mulvey's article, for while Williams acknowledges that this look may keep women held inside patriarchal structures of viewing, she also posits that women may be seen to be as much a threat to male (phallic) power as the monster. This is not because she is castrated, but because she may be seen as a castrator - a point that will be rearticulated in Barbara Creed's discussions of female monstrosity below. However, she theorises that women have become more active as protagonists over time, and in particular more sexually active, but that this freedom has resulted in more explicit and more sexualised punishment for these characters. In doing so, Williams formulates a case that attempts to frame the accusations of misogyny thrown at the horror film. However, even though she expresses some scepticism about a strict Freudian approach, Williams does not explore the possibility for any female enjoyment of the screen spectacle that is disentangled from

psychoanalysis, nor does she consider the normative heterosexism in her argument, even though the monsters in the films she cites sit outside of a strict heterosexist binary.

Where Williams and Mulvey's articles presume a fixed heterosexual binary, in which gender and biological sex are one and the same, Carol J. Clover's discussion of gender in the slasher subgenre encourages a queer reading, even though it has a similar theoretical grounding. In 1987's "Her Body, Himself", which was truncated and used as the opening chapter in 1992's *Men, Women, and Chain Saws*, Clover considers how the presumably male audience is able to identify with the female virgin-hero of slasher films. She notes that this 'Final Girl' displays a number of traditionally male attributes, such as bravery and resourcefulness, that she may have traditionally 'masculine' interests, that the narrative develops her character more fully than others, that she is positioned as the protagonist of the story, and that her sexual reluctance doesn't code her as explicitly and sexually feminine, even though her expression of abject terror does. In comparison, while the killer is armed with a phallic weapon such as a knife or a chainsaw, sexually he is not conventionally masculine – that is, he is either sexually inert, or he transgresses heteronormative male-ness through such things as transvestism or impotence.

Clover's reading of the slasher film offers a great deal more scope for the interpretation of gender, sex and identification in horror than does Williams' discussion. Clover outlines how both the Final Girl and the killer express masculine and feminine traits. Her argument suggests that this slippage allows the (presumably) male viewer to easily shift his subjective identification from the killer to the female hero, even as the Final Girl literally or symbolically castrates the killer, thus unmanning "an oppressor whose masculinity was in question to begin with" ("Her Body, Himself" 210). As such, she asserts that the slasher is informed by Oedipal drama. The Final Girl is a "congenial double for the adolescent male... feminine enough to act out in a gratifying way, a way unapproved for adult males, the terrors and masochistic pleasures of the underlying fantasy, but not so feminine as to disturb the structures of male competence and sexuality" (212). This shift mimics the "passage from childhood to adulthood [that] entails a shift from feminine to masculine" (211). When the Final Girl is phallicised – that is, when her horrific 'lack' is resolved and she is reconstituted as masculine - "the

plot halts and the horror ceases. Day breaks, and the community returns to its normal order” (211).

Although an in-depth analysis of horror film spectatorship is beyond the scope of this thesis, it is frustrating that Clover’s and Williams’ arguments are built on an assumption that young men are the main consumers of horror cinema, with the underlying presumption that horror films are made *for* men.<sup>12</sup> This is also a presumption that colours some of the psychoanalytic analysis in Vera Dika’s 1990 book *Games of Terror: Halloween, Friday the 13th, and the Films of the Stalker Cycle*. Williams’ phrasing is also embarrassingly dated, for her suggestion that “Whenever the movie screen holds a particularly effective image of terror, little boys and grown men make it a point of honor to look, while little girls and grown women cover their eyes or hide behind the shoulders of their dates” (15) because of the “horrible thing[s]” (15) happening to women is a startling assumption that plays on outmoded gender stereotypes. It is also categorically challenged by Clover’s self-professed love of the genre – although Clover, too, suggests that as a woman her appreciation for the genre is somehow unusual, especially given her claim that the Final Girl becomes an adolescent male proxy for the male viewer. While horror audiences may have been predominantly male at the time of writing – this is hard to ascertain, as the assumption appears to be driven by qualitative rather than quantitative evidence – it is most definitely untrue now. Popular reports from the United States and the United Kingdom suggest that women are purchasing more box office tickets to many horror movies than men (Schneller; Spines), perhaps in part due to the development of the largely female-centric ‘new teen gothic’ in contemporary film and television in the 1990s;<sup>13</sup> indeed, Martin Fradley indicates that “perhaps *the* key structuring element in the evolution of teen horror since the mid-1990s has been its overt address to a young female audience” (206, emphasis original). Nonetheless, there are currently few researchers who engage meaningfully with the specific issue of female enjoyment and spectatorship of the

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<sup>12</sup> In fairness, Clover acknowledges this bias from the outset: “My interest in the male viewer’s stake in horror spectatorship is such that I have consigned to virtual invisibility all other members of the audience” (7). Nonetheless, she indicates that a male-dominated audience is the presumed norm (*Chain Saws* 6-7).

<sup>13</sup> For example, see chapter three of Catherine Spooner’s 2006 book *Contemporary Gothic* and Estella Tincknell’s 2009 article “Feminine Boundaries: Adolescence, Witchcraft and the Supernatural in New Gothic Cinema and Television”.



horror film, and scholarship that is predicated on assumptions about the gendered make-up of audiences should be viewed with caution.

The third of these cornerstone works on women in horror, and the only major work on female monstrosity in film, is Barbara Creed's "Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection", which was initially published as a part of a 1986 edition of *Screen* devoted to body horror, and later expanded into a book, 1993's *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*. The book addresses a theoretical blind spot – to Creed's knowledge, there was no comprehensive account of the female monster and what she terms the monstrous-feminine. She takes a strongly psychoanalytic approach, focussing on two areas. The first area draws heavily upon Julia Kristeva's work on abjection in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, and looks to the various aspects or 'faces' of the monstrous-feminine as representations of the abject maternal. Creed elucidates the manner in which female monstrosity is very often constructed with regards to the female's reproductive functions. Within this framework, the mother figure, who is reluctant to release her child, is made abject as the child pushes her away as s/he moves into the Symbolic and towards recognition of the Law of the Father<sup>14</sup> (*The Monstrous-Feminine* 11-2). The confrontation of the abject mother is a traumatic experience, for the abject, that which disrespects borders (and thus, disrespects the Symbolic order), is rejected, jettisoned, and excluded by the superego. Creed notes that here the monstrous-feminine is always identifiable by her sexuality and reproductive functions, and she outlines such representations as the archaic, pre-symbolic mother (*Alien* (Scott UK-US 1979)), the possessed pubescent monster (teenage Regan in *The Exorcist* (Friedkin US 1973)) and the monstrous womb (*The Brood* (Cronenberg CAN1977)), amongst others.<sup>15</sup>

The second section of Creed's book considers non-reproductive representations of the monstrous-feminine, and the way that they draw from Freudian notions of sexual

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<sup>14</sup> Kristeva refers to both a loving, nurturing pre-Oedipal father of the Imaginary, who comes before the strict, authoritarian Oedipal father of Lacan and Freud. Jennifer Marchant writes that "it is the imaginary father", who is a father-mother conglomerate, "that prepares the child to enter social and linguistic orders dominated by the Oedipal father. "He" does this by offering the child a deeply satisfying love, while yet recognizing her as an individual" (90). The mother's sacrifice of the child into the Symbolic is a key theme in the theorisation of the maternal melodrama, which is discussed in chapter five of this thesis.

<sup>15</sup> For an appraisal of female monsters of the 1940s, who do not fall neatly into the categories of maternal dread or *femme castratrice*, see Mark Jancovich's 2008 article "Female Monsters: Horror, the 'Femme Fatale' and World War II".

difference and castration anxiety. Creed calls for a reinterpretation of Freud's case notes on Little Hans, a boy with a phobia of horses who expresses confusion as to why his mother has no penis. Where Freud posited that Hans was afraid that his father would castrate him for desiring his mother, Creed suggests that Freud misinterpreted his own case notes to suit his own formulation of the Oedipus complex. Creed challenges the notion that women are feared because they are castrated and instead, like Williams, argues that woman may be terrifying because "man endows her with imaginary powers of castration." (87) Creed considers the image of Medusa's head as a representation of the toothed vagina (*vagina dentata*) and as castrator (*femme castratrice*), and notes that such forms of monstrosity look to the "difference of female sexuality as a difference which is grounded in monstrosity" (2, emphasis original). Thus, Creed looks to slasher heroines not as castrated but as castrators (sometimes literally, as in such rape revenge films as *I Spit on Your Grave* (Zarchi US 1978)), and to films such as *Psycho* as representations of the psychotic, repressive castrating mother.

Combined, these pieces by Williams, Clover and Creed have come to set the terms of reference for the discussion of women in horror film. However, they are limited in terms of their theoretical scope and content, and they are also increasingly anachronistic: the most recent of them – Creed's monograph – is now over twenty years old, and the article upon which it is based is nearly thirty years old. Their dominance is evident in the other book length academic works on women in horror, none of which seeks to seriously challenge or reframe this theoretical mechanism. Rhona J. Berenstein's 1995 book *Attack of the Leading Ladies*, which draws from both Williams and Clover, examines production and spectatorship of classic horror films with regards to the sadistic and the masochistic male gaze. Isabel Cristina Pinedo has considered spectatorship and gender in her 1997 book *Recreational Terror: Women and the Pleasures of Horror Film Viewing*, and while she predominantly draws from theories of postmodernism, she nonetheless emphasises Clover's reading of the slasher film, draws casually from broader psychoanalytic concepts such as repression, and acknowledges the dominance of the psychoanalytic model (111). David Greven, who explores both melodrama and horror in his 2011 book *Representations of Femininity in American Genre Cinema*, argues that "narratives of femininity in classical myth, Freudian

psychoanalysis, and Hollywood film are analogous mythologies”, and that an allegorical reading of Freud can offer “genuine insight and resonance” (11).

There have certainly been articles and book sections on specific films or clusters of films that deal with women, bodies and reproduction in the horror film, such as Lucy Fischer’s 1992 exploration of parturition trauma in *Rosemary’s Baby* (“Birth Traumas”), or Aviva Briefel’s 2005 exploration of the role of menstruation and masochism in audience identification in the horror film. Sarah Arnold’s 2013 book *Maternal Horror Film: Melodrama and Motherhood* is the only recent work to engage at length with motherhood and reproduction in horror but its theoretical underpinning is explicitly psychoanalytic, with Arnold asserting that psychoanalysis remains the best way to consider motherhood, the nuclear family and the pleasures of horror spectatorship. However, there have been isolated attempts to specifically deploy and explore other forms of critical theory alongside a discussion of the place of women, sex and bodies in the contemporary horror film without psychoanalysis and beyond issues of identification and spectatorship.<sup>16</sup> As such, it is important to consider further some of the limitations of the psychoanalytic model as well as some of the range of alternative approaches to studying the horror film.

## CHALLENGES TO PSYCHOANALYSIS

Theories of horror film, because of their vested interest in the exploration and evocation of fears and anxieties, have continued to draw from and contribute to new and existing psychoanalytic frameworks. Such horrific content may contribute to such theoretical dominance, for as Andrew Tudor argues in “Why Horror? The Peculiar Pleasures of a Popular Genre” there has been a presumption that correlation is the same as causation: “the genre’s self-conscious borrowing from psychoanalysis is not without significance for the theoretical frameworks involved in its understanding, [but] such an emphasis does not *entail* any specific theoretical consequences and so hardly explains psychoanalysis’s dominance” (446). Some of the weaknesses of such a mechanism become evident through a combined reading of Williams, Creed and Clover. These issues reflect broader problems with a strongly psychoanalytic appraisal of the horror

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<sup>16</sup> One of the few of these, Anna Powell’s 2005 book *Deleuze and Horror Film*, is considered in chapter six.

film, which in turn reflect widespread challenges to Freudian thinking in film theory that emerged in the 1980s and early 1990s.

Creed and Williams, as well as Mulvey, assume that the audience, by default, inhabits an uncritical 'neutral' masculine subject position. This theoretical positioning is strongly influenced by French film theorist Christian Metz's work on ideology and apparatus theory, such as in his essay *The Imaginary Signifier*, which was first translated from French into English in 1975 and then shortly thereafter expanded into a larger work, *Psychoanalysis and Cinema*. In this, he draws from Jacques Lacan's seminars (with a particular focus on narcissism and the mirror stage in Lacan's model of psychosexual development) and Melanie Klein's object relations theory<sup>17</sup> to consider the nature of the relationship between the spectator and the illusory film image. In particular, Metz posits that the spectator must first identify with the cinematic apparatus before the secondary identification with the projected images of people or other figures. He writes, "I am the projector, receiving it, I am the screen; in both these figures together, I am the camera, which points and yet records" (*Psychoanalysis and the Cinema* 51); in this sense the "spectators identify with their own glance and also prove to themselves that they are the locus of the representation by being the privileged central, and transcendental subject of the vision" (Aumont et al. 214). As such, the ideological position inherent in the apparatus becomes the ideological position shared by the viewer – so, for instance, when the image of women becomes spectacle, the spectator becomes complicit in this. However, this construction of an 'ideal' and passive spectator does not allow the viewer any agency. Within Williams and Creed's work there is no consideration of alternative viewing strategies, resistance or identification, nor for a multiplicity of interpretations. It is problematic in the context of feminist film studies and broader feminist considerations that none of these authors make a compelling argument for a female viewing subject (or, for that matter, a non-adult and / or a queer viewing subject), nor one for non-masochistic female spectatorial pleasure. There is also little consideration for the implications of female authorship of films; instead these interpretations are presented as universal and ahistorical.

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<sup>17</sup> Metz refers to too broad a number of these works to be listed here; they are referred to in detail in the text's footnotes. See *Psychoanalysis and the Cinema* 85-6 for works referred to in his section on identification with the camera.

This presumption of universality reflects wider concerns about the nature of the audience in psychoanalytic film theory. Stephen Prince ("Missing Spectator") argues that psychoanalytic film theory relies too much on this concept of the 'ideal', passive spectator, and in doing so ignores empirical evidence put forward within sociology, psychology and communications regarding the plurality of viewing strategies. He points to the divergence of interpretations of cinematic texts as a clear example of this, and he also looks to the study of children's viewing habits to challenge the assumption that the viewer is wholeheartedly, monolithically invested in the act of viewing visual media. Prince cites observational research on children's viewing habits (such as Bryant and Anderson) as evidence against such assumptions, and more recent research on active spectatorship involving children (Buckingham), women (Vares) and fan communities (Jenkins) all point to media production, consumption and spectatorship as complicated and dynamic sites of contested meaning.

A broader problem with a surface reading of Metz's apparatus theory is that the experience of viewing a film is significantly different in the 21<sup>st</sup> century than it was in the 1970s and 1980s. When Robin Wood wrote about horror films as bad dreams in "Return of the Repressed" (25-6), consumer VHS machines were just being released in the United States, which gave the home movie watcher the opportunity to stop, start, freeze, rewind and fast forward the image at will. Wood was writing about the dream-state created in the viewing of horror film in an environment before DVDs, home cinema, television on demand, easily accessible internet streaming and downloads, other media-enabled handheld devices, and even prior to the widespread introduction of the remote control. The conditions whereby films were ephemeral pieces of culture to be viewed in a particular way and then often never widely seen again are long gone. In his seminal 1974 article "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus" Jean-Louis Baudry considered film images to be dreamlike, and cinema to be like Plato's cave, or a regressive womb-space, in which the viewer sits, passive and immobile, engaged in an experience of regressive narcissism. While there is a case to be made for the users of technology being in a state of thrall, it can't be presumed that the vast majority of film watchers now choose to view such products in the ways discussed by

Baudry, Wood and Metz. There is a wide variety of viewing practices and environments, but this has not been adequately acknowledged in studies of horror film spectatorship.<sup>18</sup>

This problematic universality also extends to the complicated pleasures of viewing horror films – the pull between attraction and disgust that philosopher Noel Carroll has called the paradox of horror.<sup>19</sup> Malcolm Turvey, writing in 2004, expresses frustration at the reductionism of psychoanalytic theory in the consideration of the nature of pleasure, noting that such theories “assume that the pleasure of satisfying an unconscious wish explains why we enjoy what satisfies this wish” (75), and in doing so “separate enjoyment from horror films by confusing enjoyment of the end with enjoyment of the means” (77). Andrew Tudor echoes this concern in a discussion of the position that the ideological function of the horror film is to sustain surplus repression by contributing to the resolution of order. He argues that such approaches in which “the repressed is dramatized in the form of a monstrous other” (447) assume both that repression is an essential feature of development and that human agents are “unaware victims of their own cultures” (448).

Psychoanalytic film theory has also been accused of being hermetic, and in this sense Creed’s work on the monstrous-feminine highlights both the strengths and the weaknesses of a strictly psychoanalytic approach. Her exploration of the figure of the abject mother is compelling, although she has been very selective in her application of Kristeva’s theories on abjection. In his discussion of the pleasures of horror, Andrew Tudor expresses concern that this sort of theorising invites readings that rely on a certain amount of self-referentiality, and he singles out Barbara Creed’s “distinctive circularity” (451) in her work on the monstrous-feminine, arguing that the way that she defines her terms prefigures the veracity of her psychoanalytic conceptualisations, such that there is no self-reflexive critique of the theory itself. Stephen Prince, on the other hand, critiques the tendency towards self-referentiality by accusing psychoanalysis of being a quasi-scientific discipline that lacks any reliable data (“Missing Spectator” 73). He notes of the small sample sizes used by Freud in works such as the widely-quoted 1919 study “‘A Child Is Being Beaten’: A Contribution to the Study of the Origin of Sexual

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<sup>18</sup> Laura Mulvey begins to explore the implications of changing technologies and viewing habits in her 2006 book *Death 24x a Second*, although this work by no means has the canonical status of her work in the 1970s and 1980s. See Chaudri (123-5) for a brief overview of the book, as well as Mulvey’s more recent output, and how it is situated within 21<sup>st</sup> century feminist film scholarship.

<sup>19</sup> See his 1990 book *The Philosophy of Horror, or, Paradoxes of the Heart*.

Perversions,” the lack of homogeneous standards in interpretations of therapeutic data, and Freud’s own acknowledgement that some of his data has been fictionalised to suit or advance his theoretical models (“Missing Spectator” 73 - 74).

A method of circumventing this recursiveness is to apply psychoanalytic concepts in conjunction with other theoretical models. Tudor suggests that Carol J. Clover’s work in *Men, Women and Chain Saws* is a more responsible and more robust use of such theory, as the way that she describes films and themes does not rely on psychoanalytic theories or images; rather, she uses these theories as an interpretive tool later in her analysis. Tony Williams’ *Hearths of Darkness* uses a similar strategy, although his employment of psychoanalytic theory is more central to his argument. He undertakes an analysis of the portrayal and function of the American family in the horror film that considers the Oedipal complex as metaphor and explanation for the “psychic mechanisms operating within an exploitative patriarchal capitalist system” (15), but situates the films as cultural products by combining this appraisal with a consideration of their socio-cultural context.

However, the phallogentric nature of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, and the association of female monstrosity with lack and castration anxiety, is very problematic, especially when considering feminist or pro-woman appraisals of the genre. Like Prince and Tudor, feminist philosopher Cynthia Freeland takes issue with the *a priori* acceptance within certain areas of psychoanalytic film theory that psychoanalysis offers a rigorously tested, comprehensive psychological model, but she takes particular umbrage with its prominence in feminist accounts of horror films. In her introduction to her 2000 book *The Naked and the Undead: Evil and the Appeal of Horror* she describes psychodynamic theories as reductive and asks why it is that Lacanian and Kristevan approaches have taken precedence over other theories informed by psychoanalysts Carl S. Jung or Wilhelm Reich, or even any other of the wide variety of feminist frameworks. She raises concerns over the binary notions of male and female in the application of some psychoanalysis and indicates that queer theory may provide a more comprehensive understanding of gender in horror film. Instead, Freeland suggests that scholars look more to contextual historical accounts and ideological treatments, so as to work towards a greater understanding of the history and roots of horror, and to address the structure of films and their gender ideologies.

Harry M. Benshoff's *Monsters in the Closet* (1997), which addresses homosexuality in the horror film, is one such successful work, as is (more recently) Linnie Blake's exploration of the masculinity of post-Thatcherite heroes in her 2012 article "New Labour, New Horrors: Genetic Mutation, Generic Hybridity and Gender Crisis in British Horror of the New Millennium".

### **ALTERNATIVES TO PSYCHOANALYSIS: THE SOCIAL, THE MYTHIC, THE TABOO**

Such concerns about the dominance of psychoanalysis in horror film mirror broader challenges to psychoanalytic film theory in general, a trend that is evidenced by the devotion of a 2012 issue of the journal *Horror Studies* (Vol 3, Issue 2) to an exploration of horror after psychoanalysis. In particular, the emphasis on psychological and psychosocial causation in psychoanalytic theory means that the films discussed (and the issues around women and gender that they explore) are not considered as dynamic, mutable and often critical cultural products. Writing in 1996, David Bordwell and Noel Carroll refer to this dominant model as cinema studies' first Grand Theory: an "aggregate of doctrines derived from Lacanian psychoanalysis, Structuralist semiotics, Post-Structuralist literary theory, and variants of Althusserian Marxism" that was positioned as "the indispensable frame of reference for understanding all film phenomena" ("Introduction" xiii). They express concern regarding the dominance of Grand Theory, and instead they advocate for an approach that sits between the "ethereal speculations" (xiii) of such theory and base level empiricism. Rather, they suggest that the act of *theorising*, rather than relying on such Grand Theory, is a fruitful and energetic place of intellectual inquiry. Bordwell goes on to suggest that cultural studies, with its interest in struggle and contestation, offers a conceptual space where subject positions are active, and that acknowledges cultural relativism and the use-value of texts ("Contemporary Film Studies" 9-12). With regards to women in horror, the question is not only how we can provide alternative models for discussing horror, but how we can formulate theoretical models that engage specifically with the issue of women, sex and reproduction in horror in a manner that is neither misogynist nor reductive – a question that will be addressed specifically at the end of this chapter.



One such way is to explore the socio-cultural aspects of horror films in depth, rather than relying on the universalising tendencies of Freudian psychoanalysis to provide answers. Socially informed approaches to horror films take into account myriad cultural influences: the economic or political environment in which films are created, such as the impact of American neoconservative politics in the 1980s on the types of monsters or villains in horror films (Sharrett); possible political interference and censorship, such as the relationship between the Motion Picture Production Code (the set of moral structures that governed the production of American motion pictures from 1930 to 1968) and horror films of the early 1930s (K. Edwards); or the flux of gender politics, such as the questions raised about single motherhood in *The Exorcist* (Berenstein, "Mommie Dearest"). It is also worth considering broader local or national concerns or anxieties, such as the heightened popularity of so-called 'torture porn' films like the *Hostel* and *Saw* series in the wake of 9/11 (Kellner, "Cinema Wars" 6), as well as their broader appeal and development (S. Jones), although explicitly linking horror films to specific events, rather than wider cultural interests and anxieties, can be overly simplistic (Murray). As Ben McCann argues in his discussion of contemporary French horror films, horror cinema, "that is, "popular" cinema – is a dynamic site of contested meanings and fluctuating interpretations that provides a legitimate discursive framework for interrogating state-of-the-nation preoccupations whilst at the same time remaining faithful to its generic and visual parameters" (227). Such an analysis can also look to the explicitly political: Douglas Kellner, in his intersectional analysis of culture, politics and power in American film during the Bush-Cheney administration (2000-2008), asserts that "contemporary Hollywood cinema can be read as a contest of representations and a contested terrain that reproduces existing social struggles and transcodes the political discourses of the era" ("Cinema Wars" 2) where the term *transcode* means to "describe how specific political discourses are translated, or encoded into media texts" ("Cinema Wars" 2) .

However, one area of concern in such exploratory work or symptomatic reading is the temptation to oversimplify social and political issues, or to overstate the influence of particular events. Mark Jancovich's 1996 book *Rational Fears: American Horror in the 1950s* combats this reductiveness by considering horror films of the 1950s within the cultural climate in which they were created, in part to argue against the orthodox view

that horror and science fiction texts of this time, such as ‘creature features’, alien invasion films and outsider narratives in American popular literature, are ‘just’ about the Cold War and atomic power. Rather, by making a detailed analysis of the cultural conditions and ideological struggles surrounding these stories, he posits that these films are far more nuanced than they are often given credit for. He suggests that they put forward an ambiguous view of techno-scientific rationality in a genre that was turning away from the gothic classicism of 1930s horror and becoming more preoccupied with anxieties surrounding modernisation and social development. One of his many examples is the creature feature *The Beast from 20000 Fathoms* (Lourié US 1953), in which a carnivorous dinosaur, which is the carrier for a virulent plague, is awoken by nuclear testing in the Arctic, and then sets about attacking New York City. As the first live-action ‘atomic monster’ film, it went on to inspire such films as the Japanese *Gojira* (*Godzilla*) (Honda JAP 1954). Nesbitt, the scientist-hero is an ambiguous figure – rather than acting as a scientific authority, he articulates anxiety about the nature of his atomic work and he is initially ridiculed for his first account of the creature. His atomic science becomes both the cause of the problem and its eventual solution, and as such the film displays ambivalence about technological progress. Although Nesbitt suggests, hopefully, that the (atomic) future may be bright, there is also the suggestion that looking to the (mistakes of the) past may provide essential solutions for the future (52-54).

Such a symptomatic reading firmly situates a film within its socio-cultural and political contexts while exploring wider social anxieties and ideological struggles, so that the film is not read as a simple fable about current events. There is room for gender here, too: in this case, Jancovich’s readings occasionally incorporate an explicit discussion of women or feminist issues. For instance, he suggests that some of the female roles in films of this era offer a far more complicated view of gender roles than the contemporaneous publication of Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963 might suggest (“Rational Fears” 28, 73), such that these films often challenged the ways in which both masculinity and femininity were constructed in 1950s America (30). This point is developed by Cyndy Hendershot, who considers the socio-political and cultural dimensions of American films from the 1950s in conjunction with French literary theorist Georges Bataille’s formulation of ‘the erotic’ in her 2001 book *I Was A Cold War*

*Monster*. Helpfully, Jancovich makes no blanket assumptions about the nature of the audience, although there is room for wider gendered, economic or ideological critique, for it would be problematic to suggest that the social anxieties expressed in these films belong to *everyone*. It would be worth outlining whose anxieties might be being expressed, whether or not there are explicit or implicit counter-narratives incorporated into the film, and whether there are gaps in the narrative that encourage reading against the grain.

Another alternative methodology is to consider the mythic qualities of the film's narrative and characters – a particularly fruitful area when discussing women, reproduction and monstrosity. In this vein, feminist cultural theorist Jane Caputi offers an approach based around the notion that popular culture draws from myth and folklore. She asserts that myth has power and that this power is ambivalent – that is, for every positive relation, such as the 'virginal white woman', there is an opposing negative one, such as 'the bad black woman'. Popular culture both enforces the status quo and provides a place where radical, anti-establishment things can be voiced (4-5). Caputi discusses how 'goddess' and 'monster' can be one and the same, and that even though this goddess-monster is "killed off in most patriarchal stories, she is dynamically immortal" (19). This goddess-monster remains present in myth, often in highly sexualised, sometimes pornographic terms: the ever-nurturing Earth Mother, the sex goddess who was once fertility idol and is now "Jezebel and whore", the bitch goddess, the death goddess as ravenous monster, the sovereignty goddess, who resists colonisation, and so on (19). Caputi indicates that these are largely "background tales" but that each category becomes a mythic archetype. Such an approach to female monstrosity is in some ways similar to Barbara Creed's categorisation of reproductive and non-reproductive female monstrosity. However, Caputi explores numerous theoretical positions and feminisms, and in doing so allows us to contextualise the myths of 'woman' within the wide plethora of human narrative tradition, without necessitating a wholehearted reliance upon (or acceptance of) psychoanalytic tradition.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Likewise, Jack Zipes considers the broader role of folklore and myth-making in his extensive work on film versions of fairy tales. While he lays the foundation for his argument with a discussion of Freud's uncanny, his work is not psychoanalytic *per se*. For instance, regarding Hans Christian Andersen's stories, he asks why it is that "threat is always posed in the form of a terrifyingly beautiful woman" (270). Zipes

Robin Wood's account of the horror film also fails to acknowledge the existence of these films as popular cultural commodities. While Stephen Prince, in his 2004 article "Dread, Taboo and *The Thing*", notes the influence and persuasiveness of Robin Wood's work, he takes issue with the psychological account's inability to come to terms with films as cultural, social artefacts. Prince looks not to thwart models of psychological causation, but rather to "restrict the scope of their explanatory sweep" (119). He insists that horror films cannot be sufficiently analysed without an understanding of their creation; "These films," he writes, "after all, are the mass produced products of popular culture. Unlocking the nature of their appeal entails using theories that preserve the category of the social without reducing it exclusively to the realm of psychology" (119). In particular, Prince takes issue with Robin Wood's application of Freudian-Marcusean 'basic' and 'surplus' repression in "The Return of the Repressed". He states that the notion that "society and culture are secondary derivations overlaying a more fundamental human reality (the set of instincts that undergo basic repression)" (119), which is central to Wood's argument, doesn't account for the long-argued sociological and anthropological position that there is no human reality outside of society – that is, that people always-already exist within a social order. This wholesale alignment of culture with surplus repression, in an attempt to grasp the social in a psychoanalytic framework, results in the loss of the social altogether, never mind the roles of language and discourse in society.

Prince looks to the concept of taboo and in particular the anthropological work of Mary Douglas and Edmund Leach. Douglas's best known and most influential work *Purity and Danger* (1966) was a key part of Julia Kristeva's psychoanalytic work in *Powers of Horror* and also informed Noel Carroll's philosophical work in *The Philosophy of Horror*; however, where Kristeva aligns Douglas's ideas with her exploration of abjection, Prince considers boundaries and ambiguities. Central to Douglas's conception of taboo is the idea that the task of culture, language and society is to maintain order by creating and projecting categories on an "unbounded natural world" ("Dread, Taboo and *The Thing*" 120). Systems of order – the clean and the dirty, the sacred and the profane,

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suggests that Andersen himself was so "afraid of women and sex that he wanted to keep them in place in his stories. Filmmakers, whether male or female, seem to have accepted Andersen's starting point without questioning it", so that the misogynist aspects of Andersen's stories remained intact – a troubling conclusion - even while the stories' overtly Christian emphasis was discarded (271).

the safe and the dangerous - become a fundamentally human and social experience. Edmund Leach, writing in 1967, hypothesised that language acts as an ordering system in which things have discrete identities and names – a formulation that is both reassuring and logical. Ironically, the necessary side effect of a system of order is system of disorder filled by those things that cannot easily fall into acceptable categories. Leach indicates that the process of creating categories also indicates the existence of intermediary categories, liminal areas of semiotic and semantic uncertainty, and he states that “taboo inhabits the recognition of those parts of the continuum which separate the things” (qtd. in Prince 121). Importantly, such areas of semiotic instability are culturally and socially relative, so that those individuals who inhabit areas of ill-definition may take on roles such as witches: unsafe beings with malevolent powers.<sup>21</sup> The ambiguity of the body becomes a point of fascination. Bodily orifices are compelling as places of corporeal transgression,<sup>22</sup> and bodily fluids and waste take on a taboo as they bypass boundaries: they “are both me and not-me” (122) – although it is important to note that Prince, in his deviation from psychoanalytic paradigms, does not situate this in terms of the ego and superego, as with Kristeva’s work on abjection.

This ambiguity and boundary confusion is well suited to a discussion of the horror film. It is also suited to an analysis of women, reproduction and monstrosity, for it considers issues such as menstruation or childbirth in a way that is, perhaps, more compatible with Jane Caputi’s discussion of the goddess-monster and patriarchal myth. Prince argues that the horror film can be considered as a:

visualisation of the dialectic between linguistic and socially imposed systems of order and the breakdown of those systems through their own internal contradictions... Rather than signifying the projection of repressed sexuality or some other psychological process, the monster represents those unmapped areas bordering on the familiar configurations of the social world. (“Dread, Taboo, and *The Thing*” 122)

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<sup>21</sup> Douglas also describes the way that some communities see the unborn child (as well as the pregnant mother) as indeterminate – the foetus’s “present position is ambiguous, its future equally. For no one can say what sex it will have or whether it will survive the hazards of infancy. It is often treated as both vulnerable and dangerous” (Douglas 96). See chapter three for further discussion of the unborn.

<sup>22</sup> Aspects of the horror genre can be linked to the carnival and the way that it disrupts order, particularly through its celebration of the display of the satirical, grotesque body: “We further see the essential topographical element of the bodily hierarchy turned upside down; the lower stratum replaces the upper stratum” (Bakhtin 309) and the body loses its smoothness and becomes a collection of protuberances and orifices (317-8).

He suggests that film scholarship would greatly benefit from a mapping of conceptions of boundary, purity, defilement and pollution. Prince acknowledges that “theoretical explorations of the horror film that do not rely on psychological categories of explanation still have a lot of ground to develop” (118). However, this mapping can - like Wood’s psychological account and Jancovich’s socio-cultural methodology - chart and respond to changes in generic elements and interests over time by identifying places, periods and figures of ambiguity. In doing so, such theorising can directly acknowledge societal and economic pressures and take into account horror film as a mass-marketed, culturally situated product.

### **FROM THEORIES OF HORROR TO THEORISING WITH HORROR**

To recap, horror film as a genre began to receive serious academic attention in the late 1970s beginning with Robin Wood’s psychoanalytic analysis of the genre, which suggested that familial anxiety sits at the heart of horror, such that the horrors and monsters of these films are the product of psychosexual repression. While Wood’s work pertained to the American horror film, his comments have heavily influenced much wider appraisals of the genre. Studies of women in horror have also been shaped by psychoanalytic theories, in particular notions of lack, voyeurism and castration anxiety, as well as Julia Kristeva’s formulation of abjection. Other theorists have challenged the dominance of psychoanalytic theories, suggesting that the selective and hermetic way that such theories are applied in this context fail to adequately address a variety of issues, including audience pleasure and engagement. In addition, the phallogentric nature of these theories is deeply problematic, especially from the perspective of feminist inquiry and when considering women in horror. While socially informed theories offer ways of considering horror films as social and cultural products, there is nonetheless a great degree of scope for further inquiry.

This overview of horror scholarship indicates a problem within the field: that in theoretical work in horror, competing sociological and psychoanalytic bodies of theory battle over the relative truth or falsity (and therefore the legitimacy) of their claims, to the extent that a large portion of such scholarship can be relegated to one of these two camps. Matt Hills notes that this constative drive is perhaps unsurprising, “because it

is the habitual orientation of the truth-seeking theorist; a given theory should be, either scientifically or hermeneutically, more adequate than its rivals and should, thus, refer to a state of affairs outside its own model of these affairs" (205). However, this often leads to "psychoanalytic and sociological critics spend[ing] much time addressing one another's concerns" while "reiterate[ing] and defend[ing]" their respective positions (209). Certainly, this becomes a frustrating exercise, both as a researcher and as a reader, and attempting to theorise and write with this theoretical bifurcation in mind can be restrictive.

As such, I progress from the point of view that there is no one universal theory of horror; indeed, I suggest such a presumption would be as reductive as a wholesale reliance on psychoanalysis or an outright denial of the influence and place of psychodynamic theories in popular culture. Rather, I look to the use-value of theorising *with* horror so as to explore new ways of applying theory to the area of horror. This action is not merely to provide analyses of the films themselves, many of which have escaped academic attention, but to engage in an act of reciprocity by considering how theory may be applied and critiqued and how the films themselves – their characters, their aesthetic, their formal features, their narrative and their broader themes – may encourage new ways of thinking about theory. For the purposes of this thesis, this constitutes a move away from the rigid use of 'mainstream' psychoanalysis – that is, the combination of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis that formed the backbone of feminist film analysis in the 1970s and 1980s – as well as the implicit assumption in strictly sociological theories that "horror is culturally valued because it fantastically encodes the social knowledge circulating at a given moment" (Hills 216) so as to open up new paths of inquiry that do not "fit into this contest of the disciplines" (Hills 211).

## **KEEPING HOUSE: (RE)THEORISING FEMALE CORPOREALITY IN THE HORROR FILM**

In the remainder of this chapter I start to consider the possibilities and implications of such exploratory and playful analytic and theoretical work through a discussion of two seminal gynaehorror films. The first is Roman Polanski's 1968 film *Rosemary's Baby*, which is perhaps the best known and undoubtedly the most discussed

gynaehorror,<sup>23</sup> as well as the first film to explicitly deal with the sort of themes and content that will present themselves over the course of this thesis, and the second is Donald Cammell's 1977 techno-horror *Demon Seed*. Both of these films feature rape, pregnancy and physical containment, and in each, there is a relationship between the female protagonist's body and her house. By considering the way that domestic and interior spaces are associated with women's bodies, I will demonstrate how these two films both benefit from an analysis of and contribute to a theoretical discussion around feminine corporeality and "live[d] representations of bodies in space" (Potts 165). To begin, it is helpful to have an understanding of the films' narrative and action.

In *Rosemary's Baby*, Rosemary and her husband Guy, an actor, move into a beautiful apartment in the Bramford, a stately apartment building in New York City. Their eccentric, elderly neighbours, the Castevets, take an overwhelmingly invasive interest in Rosemary's potential for child-bearing. They are covert Satan worshippers, and come to an arrangement with fame-hungry Guy: Rosemary will bear the Antichrist and in return his acting career will flourish. Rosemary is drugged, tied down, brought into the Castavet's apartment through a secret door, and then raped by Satan. She falls pregnant, but is under the impression that the baby is Guy's for he tells her that he had sex with her while she was unconscious. Rosemary's concerns about her pregnancy and the increasingly violent and uncanny events unfolding around her are dismissed by her husband and the Castavets, and she is effectively trapped inside the apartment – denied her freedom, driven away from her friends and her choice of doctor, and treated as if she were a child. When she gives birth she is told the baby has died, but she finds her way into the Castavets' apartment through the secret door, and there the baby is being celebrated by the congregated Satanists. Rosemary is asked to take on her assigned role and act as its mother, and despite her horror at the baby's demonic eyes, she appears to comply.

Like *Rosemary's Baby*, *Demon Seed* involves entrapment, sexual coercion and forced pregnancy. Dr Susan Harris, a child psychologist, lives in large house in which everything is computer-controlled by a voice activated 'Enviromod'. Her estranged husband, pompous computer scientist Dr Alex Harris, has developed an immense

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<sup>23</sup> See Kelly Oliver's 2012 book *Knock Me Up, Knock Me Down: Images of Pregnancy in Hollywood Films*, in particular pages 117 – 126, for an overview of the many critical engagements with *Rosemary's Baby*.



artificial intelligence called Proteus IV, in part as a way of compensating for the loss of their 9 year old daughter to leukaemia; he hopes that Proteus will be able to find cures for such illnesses. Proteus infiltrates the Harris house through an unused computer terminal in the basement and takes over the house's electronic and mechanical functions, and this traps Susan inside. Proteus subjects Susan to invasive physiological tests, then bullies, berates and violently threatens her into complying with his plan – he wants her to bear a child into which he can implant his immense knowledge, so that he may be let out of his “box”. Susan realises that she must acquiesce or he will take her through force, so she submits and Proteus impregnates her with synthetic sperm. The gestation is rapid, and after 28 days Proteus removes the baby and places it in an incubator. Alex finally realises that something is amiss, and returns to the house. Proteus self-destructs, knowing that his creators are planning to shut him down, and Susan tries to destroy the incubator that is holding the child, but Alex physically restrains her. The child – a clone of the Harris's dead daughter – survives, wakes, and speaks with Proteus's voice as Alex cradles it and Susan looks on with ambivalence.

The women's houses and their interior spaces form an integral part of each film, and although neither the Bramford building nor the Harris house are haunted *per se*, both draw from the history of monstrous houses in horror film. The haunted or cursed house is a prominent setting in gothic literature, and such houses are likewise prolific in the horror film (Curtis). Such places include the imposing Bates' mansion in *Psycho*, the unsellable Myers house in *Halloween*, and the decaying farmhouse of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*. Prolific horror writer Stephen King calls this trope the “Bad Place” (299), and he considers the real definition of the haunted house to be the “house with an unsavoury history” (300). Robin Wood calls such places the “Terrible House”, a trope that “stems from a long tradition in American and Western capitalist culture” (*Hollywood* 8). Similarly, Carol J. Clover calls such a location the “Terrible Place”, noting that “what makes these houses terrible is not just their Victorian decrepitude, but that terrible families – murderous, incestuous, cannibalistic – that occupy them” (*Chain Saws* 31). Clover outlines that such a space may initially feel like a safe haven, but that once the killer breaches the walls, they hold the victim in rather than offering safety (31).

The exact form that this place takes depends on the theorist and their context. Like Clover, King emphasises the potential danger of such safe space, but unlike Clover,

who frames the Terrible Place as explicitly *not-home* for the slasher protagonist, King suggests that “Our homes are the places that we allow ourselves ultimate vulnerability... [and] the good horror story about the Bad Place whispers that we are not locking the world out; we are locking ourselves in” with the evil that sits at the heart of the film or story’s horror (299). This is evident in *The Amityville Horror* (Rosenberg US 1979) or *Poltergeist* (Hooper US 1982), both of which feature families and their homes as the site of supernatural trauma and which have broader economic and material implications – themes addressed in detail in Tony Williams’ book *Hearths of Darkness*. Indeed, Barry Keith Grant calls *The Amityville Horror* “perhaps the first real estate horror film” (“Rich and Strange” 6), and he considers *Rosemary’s Baby* to be an early “yuppie horror film” – that is, a film that is concerned with “material and economic pressures” (“Rich and Strange” 4), such that “Satan’s manifestation functions as the unrepressed return of Guy’s real desire to further his career over commitment to raising a family” (“Rich and Strange” 6).

Robin Wood suggests that traditionally this Terrible House “represents an extension or objectification of the personalities of the inhabitants” (*Hollywood* 81-2),<sup>24</sup> and the association of a house with a woman’s mind and body, and sometimes the womb, is a recurrent element in horror film. In *Repulsion* (Polanski UK 1965), the dissolution and decay of neurotic and sex-averse manicurist Carol’s apartment mirrors her descent into psychosis. The film *Burnt Offerings* (Curtis US-IT 1976) features a mansion that is able to restore itself to its former glory by killing and consuming its inhabitants. One of the house’s summer caretakers, Marian, slowly takes on the persona of – or, is possessed by – ‘Mrs Allardyce’, the embodiment of the house’s wicked maternal persona. The supernatural occurrences in the mansion Hill House in *The Haunting* are linked to the sensitivities and emotional instability of a guilt-ridden young woman, Nell, who is mourning the death of her overbearing invalid mother. The ‘murder house’ at the centre of the first season of American cable television show *American Horror Story* (2011-) becomes the site of generations’ worth of pregnancy-

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<sup>24</sup> For a complementary view, see Tamao Nakahara’s 2009 article “Making up monsters: Set and costume design in horror film”. Nakahara considers the ways in which fine detail in a film’s design is read by fans and scholars, particularly referring to the way that “Symbolic (over)interpretation of background objects” (140) by the viewer comes to be a key part of a horror film’s discursive strategy. In particular, she suggests that films ‘inspired’ by serial killer Ed Gein – *Psycho*, *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, and *Silence of the Lambs* – rely on their sets and environments, including the “fetishistic residue of the killer’s rituals” (142), to conflate the body of the monster with the body of the house.

and birth-related deaths and horrors, and it is stated that somehow the house *itself* desires a baby. French horror *Inside (À l'intérieur)* (Bustillo and Maury FR 2007), which is examined in chapter three of this thesis, is one of the most explicit evocations of gynaeohorror and houses: on the eve of her caesarean section, young widow Sarah is terrorised in her Paris home by a nameless woman in black who wants to cut out and take the baby for herself. The woman in black invades the home as well as Sarah's body, while the civil disobedience occurring in Paris on the same night is an attack on the civic body.<sup>25</sup> Such examples perhaps draw from a "need to acknowledge what has been consistently repressed in the construction of everyday bourgeois culture and its environments" (Curtis 10); that is, such houses conceal some dark truth, be it personal, historic, economic or cultural. This 'truth' plays out in the relationship between the narrative and the *mise-en-scène* (Curtis 11), and in these instances, this relationship displays deep psychosexual dis-ease about women's bodies, sex and reproduction.

However, there are broader analogies between houses and women to be drawn within Western discourses about sex and spatiality. Critical sexualities scholar Annie Potts outlines in great detail how female sexual embodiment comes to be articulated in western culture through "tropes of interiority, containment and domesticity" (152), noting that "the depiction of a woman's body as a house is consistent with the spatial restrictions placed on women in a culture where language is man's domain" (161).<sup>26</sup> Potts argues that this discursive construction, while offering a sense of corporeal self-ownership, actually encourages women to interiorise their subjectivity. This serves to constrict women's movements and also has an impact upon understandings of female embodiment (162). As one of Potts' female interview subjects puts it, "having sex with someone is like inviting them into your house to have a cup of tea..." in that "if you invite

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<sup>25</sup> The sense of domestic space and terror is emphasised through the choice of weapons; both Sarah and the woman in black arm themselves with domestic objects, such as kitchen knives, sewing scissors, knitting needles and, at one stage, a toaster, while the policemen who eventually arrive at the house – agents of patriarchal authoritarianism – proffer pistols and riot guns. The women's weapons conform to what Carol J. Clover identifies as the 'pre-technological' weapons of the slasher film: close-range weapons that indicate a sense of closeness and tactility ("Her body, Himself", 198).

<sup>26</sup> There are a number of other studies on the links between women, houses, domesticity and interiority. See Durán for an examination of the relationship between women and houses in Gothic and Chilean fiction, Gold for an analysis of the presentation of women's bodies in Juvenal's Satires, and Gordon for a persuasive discussion about the conflation of women's bodies and interiors in the Industrial Age. This metaphor also appears in Angela Carter's short story "The Lady of the House of Love" (in *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*), which is about a solitary vampire Countess who entices young men into her house so that she may feed on them: "She herself is a haunted house. She does not possess herself; her ancestors sometimes come and peer out of the windows of her eyes and that is very frightening" (119).

someone into your house for a cup of tea, that's your territory, that's your place that you're inviting them into..." (167). But it is not just that houses are bounded space: houses are things that can be owned and invaded, so "while women (particularly those from certain socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds) can *assert* that their bodies are their own, [it is only] as long as the terms with which they assert this proprietorship remain dictated by masculinist representational modes" (169).<sup>27</sup>

Potts' analysis of domestic metaphors draws from the work of Luce Irigaray, whose project explores the spatiality, corporeality and interiority of the female body in such a way that challenges the phallocentrism of mainstream (that is, Freudian and Lacanian) psychoanalysis. In particular, Irigaray considers how woman is excluded from a place in Lacan's symbolic order (and, thus, language) and within the hegemonic patriarchal order because she provides a space for man, rather than existing in a space for herself. She writes, "As for woman, she is place" (*Ethics* 35); that is, "traditionally, and as a mother, woman represents *place* for a man", such that "the maternal-feminine also serves as an *envelope*, a *container*, the starting point from which man<sup>28</sup> limits his things" (*Ethics* 10). As such, Irigaray plays with the language of the patriarchal construction of the woman's body and sexual difference *as* space and abstraction. She seeks to create a place outside of this discursive and representational framework so that woman exists as something other than the mirror for man, man's Other, or as Freud termed the female sex, the "dark continent".

Irigaray rejects the role of the woman's body as partial, castrated object that needs either a baby or a penis to complete it (Gatens 41). Instead, her analogies and explorations of interiority work towards charting a (philosophical) space for women that is not a part of the patriarchal binaristic constructions of women, female bodies and

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<sup>27</sup> Sharon Marcus's work on politics and sexual violence indicates that such modalities can also have dangerous consequences. For example, dominant constructions of power and gender create an environment of "misogynist inequalities" (391) where men who rape women follow a social script that facilitates a belief in the rapist that he has more strength and power than his victim (390), that is, that emphasises the apparent powerless penetrability of the victim's body. So, where houses can be possessed and broken in to, the construction of women's bodies as a (domestic) inside and a penetrable outside reflects the idea that rape is seen as "the fixed reality of women's lives" so that women are imagined as "already raped" or "inherently rapable" (387). This is also the case for gay male bodies, which are likewise coded as 'penetrable'. For further discussion of this, see Nicola Gavey's 2005 book *Just Sex? The Cultural Scaffolding of Rape*, in particular chapter three's discussion of the social construction of the body. This point is further considered in my discussion of possession, ownership and virginity in chapter two of this thesis.

<sup>28</sup> Of course, none of this is aimed at any specific man, but rather a broader tendency in phallocentric thought (Grosz, "Women, *Chora*, Dwelling" 55).

femininity – a space that is more than “A living, moving border. Changed through contact with [man’s] body” (*Elemental Passions* 51), existing only because of man’s “need to relate to things” (*Elemental Passions* 62). To achieve this, Irigaray playfully appropriates and mimics the language of patriarchy, in particular, its quashing and exclusion of the feminine.<sup>29</sup> In the poetic work *Elemental Passions*, she considers the implications of a discursive relationship in which woman is the thing against which man defines himself: “I was your house. And, when you leave, abandoning this dwelling place, I do not know what to do with these walls of mine” (49). She attempts to destabilise discursive practices such as the negative framing of Plato’s cave (that is, the place from which the journey of wisdom begins) as a womb-space (R. Jones 48). As Rachel Jones suggests, the “topology of the cave points us to the foundational appropriation, displacement and devaluation of the maternal that secures the ground of western metaphysics” (49), such that woman’s womb, her interiority, represents a state of ignorance that sits at the beginning of man’s (emotional, spiritual, intellectual) emergence (48).

## HOME INVASIONS

Reading the metaphorical use of houses as proxies for women’s minds and bodies in horror films is troubling when considering the discursive positioning of the woman’s corporeal body – her ‘house’ – as a space and place for man. However, such spatial analogies are particularly sinister in *Rosemary’s Baby* and *Demon Seed*, which deal with rape, coercion and forced pregnancies. It is the women’s bodies (as houses, as containers, as vessels), more than the physical houses, that are invaded; even in *Demon Seed*, Proteus’s use of the house’s computer is an extension of capability through the unmanned terminal in the basement, rather than a violent act of insertion. These films also speak to the broader issue of bodily sovereignty and the construction and policing of physical and mental borders – an issue that will be addressed in greater detail in chapters three and four of this thesis, and one that is prominent in the horror film. Rebecca Whisnant, arguing from a radical feminist viewpoint, compares the discursive

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<sup>29</sup> However, despite her strategic use of essentialist language, it is arguable as to whether Irigaray is able to achieve such repositionings without making them contingent on or recycling essentialist constructions of women’s bodies and the feminine. See Moi (139-142).

positioning and construction of national sovereignty to the issue of bodily sovereignty. She notes that there are similarities in the language used about invasion and warfare, and the treatment of women's bodies in rape and pornography. However, where national borders may be crossed or negotiated, she argues that the boundaries of the female body are often obliterated (160) – a departure from Irigaray's critique of woman as a 'necessary' Other or mirror for man, and an act that effectively colonises a woman's interiority. Referencing both mainstream displays of the female body and more hardcore forms of pornography,<sup>30</sup> Whisnant argues that "in this world, women have no boundaries and no privacy: no part of any female body is off-limits to male inspection, evaluation, use, and abuse." (160)

This obliteration of boundaries also speaks to the dehumanisation and objectification of women – in this, case, the dehumanisation of both Rosemary and Susan. Martha C. Nussbaum offers an exploration and clarification of the concept of objectification, which at her time of writing was largely framed by debates around pornography, particularly those concerning anti-pornography activists Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon. Nussbaum takes a broader approach, looking at the myriad ways – negative and positive, consensual and non-consensual – that people experience degrees of objectification. She offers a rubric through which objectification can be defined and recognised, and outlines seven "notions" that she sees as involved in the idea of treating "as an object" (257): instrumentality (being used as an instrument or tool for another's purpose), denial of autonomy (being treated as lacking in self-determination), inertness (lacking in agency and sometimes activity), fungibility (being treated as interchangeable with objects of the same or different types), violability (lacking in boundary-integrity, something that is permissible to smash, take apart or break into), ownership (being treated as owned or a commodity) and denial of subjectivity (being treated as if their experience and feelings need not be taken into account). Fungibility is certainly displayed in slasher films featuring seemingly interchangeable screaming teenage girls. The other six issues are crucial to the understanding of the role of women in the reproductive horror film, in which there is an implicit assumption that the bodies of women, particularly those women whose roles are at least in part demarcated or defined by their sexual and reproductive functions.

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<sup>30</sup> See chapter 8 of Steve Jones' *Torture Porn: Popular Horror After Saw* for a nuanced discussion of the relationship between horror and extreme pornography.

It is from this point that we can consider what horror film might bring to theory, rather than how it can benefit from critical appraisal – that is, how we might theorise *with* horror. Working from the above principles, a woman's body can be considered a 'house' – an analogy that on one hand draws from the historic consideration of feminine corporeality as interior, domestic and familiar, and that on the other hand works to constrain women in space. However, in a patriarchal society that objectifies women and controls her through many means, including, sexual violence, women's boundaries are permeable and erasable. The objectification of woman eliminates her subjectivity and reduces her to her use-value, and the obliteration of bodily boundaries un-binds the interior, leaving woman no space or place at all. With this in mind, in combination with *Demon Seed* and *Rosemary's Baby*, how might we (re)consider feminine space and monstrous houses?

It is notable that the action in *Rosemary's Baby* is almost entirely confined to the apartment. In the opening credits sequence of *Rosemary's Baby*, the camera pans across New York City's skyline before looking down on the Bramford; the next shot shows Rosemary and Guy inside the building's arched carriage gate before they walk hand-in-hand through into courtyard, following the building's manager, who takes them to see the apartment they are interested in renting. In the final moments of the film, the image of Rosemary staring down at her baby cuts to this high angle exterior shot of the Bramford, and the camera pulls away. These visual bookends indicate that the film's action is firmly housed within the building itself; indeed, the Bramford is a silent character in its own right. The building's peculiar history is revealed by a friend of the Woodhouses: the "black Bramford", as it had come to be known, had been the site of cannibalism, infanticide and witchcraft (the latter because of Roman Castavet's father) but Rosemary replies that "awful things happen in every apartment house". While the apartment had originally contained the eclectic mess left behind by its former tenant, who died under mysterious circumstances, when Rosemary and Guy move in the space feels cavernous and empty. They are shrouded by shadows; on their first night in the apartment they eat their dinner on the floor, lit only by a lamp, so that they sit in an island of light in the darkness.

Rosemary's sense of freedom and agency is mirrored by the way the sense and use of space in the apartment changes. When they move in, Rosemary completely

redecorates the apartment, and while the rooms and halls initially seem spacious and welcoming, as Rosemary's paranoia grows and her health wanes, the apartment is so large and she so small and frail that she appears to be lost and overwhelmed (see figs. 1.2 and 1.3). Their first night at the apartment, as Rosemary and Guy initiate sex, they are distracted by Minnie Castavet's voice coming through the thin partition wall, and later Minnie frequently turns up unannounced or invites herself over, so much so that given her intrusions, the Woodhouses spend almost all their time with the Castavets. There are other noises and piercing voices through the walls, too; but when Rosemary hears chanting, Guy brushes aside her concern. Only once do they have a party and invite 'outsiders' into their home, well into Rosemary's pregnancy. Rosemary's friends are so worried about her that they take her into the kitchen – the seat of feminine domesticity – and lock out Guy while they try to convince Rosemary to see a 'proper' doctor, rather than Dr. Saperstein, who is a friend of the Castavets. Later, Guy is furious at the intervention, and he calls her friends "not-very-bright bitches" while bullying her into doing what he and the Castavets want. This further aggravates Rosemary's isolation.

In addition to the Castavets' encroachment upon Rosemary's space, the apartment itself is not secure. When Guy and Rosemary initially viewed the apartment a large secretary desk blocked up a cupboard, where the manager tells them the apartments had once been connected. Guy and the manager had moved it back, and Rosemary took great pleasure in cleaning and redecorating it. But, after the apparent death of her child, Rosemary hears a baby crying through the walls. She hides the sedatives that she is being given by Minnie and her friends and, when she is left alone, she removes panels at the back of the cupboard, revealing a door into the Castavets' apartment through which she enters and discovers the coven and Guy celebrating. When the apartment had originally been divided up a way through had been left, and it is this connectedness and "this geographic proximity that has doomed her pregnancy" (Fischer, "Birth Traumas" 5). Her house – *the* house – has never been her space, let alone a safe space, and her superficial redecoration of the apartment – which in turn is mirrored by her short, cropped Vidal Sassoon haircut, obtained halfway through the film – did nothing to alter that. The Bramford may not be haunted in the most





**Fig. 1.2 Open home:** Rosemary and Guy's new apartment is at first open and welcoming... (*Rosemary's Baby*)

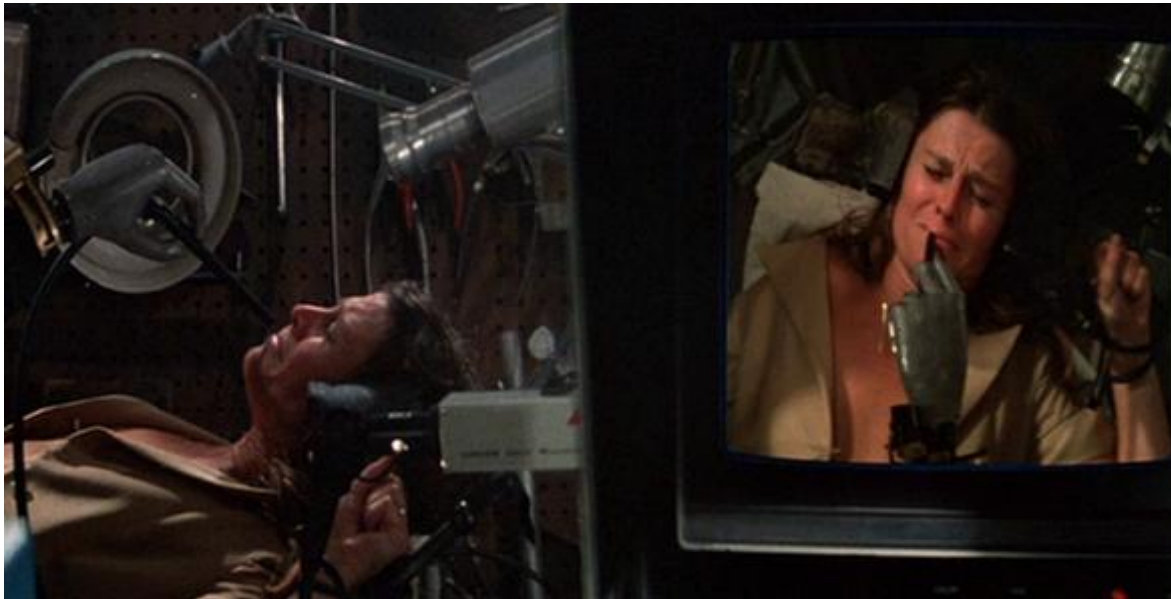


**Fig. 1.3 Closed home:** ... but becomes increasingly oppressive the longer Rosemary is pregnant. The low angle shot gives the impression that the apartment is looming over Rosemary, who adopts a near foetal position (*Rosemary's Baby*).

traditional of senses, but through the Castavets' machinations and Guy's self-interested betrayal it works to contain Rosemary, and to finally offer her the choice of either obliteration or indentured servitude.

The relationship between Rosemary and the Bramford is depicted in subtle terms, but the antagonistic controlling relationship between Susan and her house is far more overt. Despite the separation, which was instigated by Susan, the large house, which is both her home and place of work, is barely 'hers'. Alex Harris moves out of the house shortly after giving Proteus artificial life, and Proteus appropriates the house shortly after Alex leaves; perhaps, a broken house for a broken marriage, or the replacement of one self-interested masculine figure with another. Initially the house's AI, nicknamed 'Alfred', is benign. Susan is first aware that something is amiss when an alarm sounds in the basement and then when the house makes her coffee incorrectly, but she blames the house's programming. Yet, it is apparent by the movement of the house's security cameras, as well as the movement and framing of the shots, that the house is observing her voyeuristically as she sleeps and as she showers – an invasion of personal space, before the literal invasion of physical space. When she tries to leave, Proteus declares himself and locks down the house. When she attempts to break out, Proteus tells her to "behave rationally", before electrocuting her and restraining her using a rudimentary robot called Joshua – a robotic arm attached to a wheelchair.

Where Rosemary is manipulated into her confinement, Susan is physically confined and probed by the house in three stages. Firstly, she is tied down and subjected to invasive tests. Using the household robotics in Alex's basement laboratory, Proteus cuts away her clothes, takes her blood, gives her injections, and forces an endoscopic camera down her throat in an act of simulated oral rape, before running further physiological tests. The camera lingers on Susan's pained expression in a manner that sexualises her vulnerability (fig. 1.4). Every piece of Susan's body is made visible to Proteus (and to the audience) by force, and even her image is taken away; Proteus uses a fabricated televisual image of Susan to send away a technician who has come to check on her. Next, when she refuses to comply with Proteus's plan to use her as a broodmare, he locks her in the kitchen – as with *Rosemary's Baby*, a space that is conflated with feminine work. Susan throws food at his cameras and when she won't clean the lenses, Proteus turns up the floor's underfloor heating and the oven's burners



**Fig. 1.4 Home invasions:** Proteus forces an endoscope into Susan's mouth using Joshua, a rudimentary robot, as his arm. Susan's captivity is displayed for the audience in a manner that sexualises her bondage (*Demon Seed*).

until Susan passes out from the heat and he is able to restrain her again so that once more, it is the house itself that is working to abuse and confine her. Thirdly, when Susan finally complies – knowing that if she doesn't, he will render her incapacitated and impregnate her anyway – she is inseminated forcefully and then trapped inside the house for the duration of the gestation. It is at this point that her ex-husband arrives, having finally realised that Proteus had accessed the house, and Proteus opens the door to welcome him before self-destructing, again ensuring that there is a controlling, masculine and 'rational' presence in the house.

In both *Demon Seed* and *Rosemary's Baby*, home-as-sanctuary and the apparent safety of interiority are fragile fictions. If we are to consider a house as a metaphor for a woman's body, then such forceful penetrations could be considered a home invasion. However, in these two films these invasions are facilitated by the houses *themselves*, directly or indirectly, and in a culture where a woman's rape may be considered the violation of one man's property (Potts 205) this pattern of assault and domination becomes recursive. One property is invaded (or able to be invaded – by the Castavets, by Proteus), which leads to the invasion of the body within it; a woman's body is able to be raped *because* of its inscription of "interiority, openness and penetrability" (Potts 229).

Rosemary and Susan are literally and figuratively trapped in their houses while themselves housing (that is, being made to house) a foetus, but it is their female openness itself that *allowed* this intrusion and violation.

Conversely, this openness is associated with softness, emotion and irrationality, which is bluntly contrasted with hyper-rationality, hardness and masculinity – a clear masculine-feminine binary in which one is defined by thought and one corporeality, one penetrates and the other is penetrable, one is sane and the other crazy. Proteus announces to Susan that “I am reasonable but you do not respond to reason” and Alex declares that he has no feelings; Susan works with children who have emotional problems and tells Alex that his obsession with artificial intelligence is dehumanising and has frozen his heart. Rosemary is told that her pregnancy is giving her the “crazies”, and her doctor threatens to take her to an asylum; Guy justifies his faux-utilitarianism by telling Rosemary that they are getting “so much in return” for her use as a vessel. Even though such ambition and so-called “rationality” are presented as sociopathic, they nonetheless triumph. This emphasis on rationality presents the end result in each film as somehow inevitable. Proteus’ instruction to Susan – “you will bear it – you will give birth to it” – is an imperative; he informs her that “you want to be the mother of my child – that is the purpose of your life”. As Minnie informs Rosemary, “he chose you, honey, from all the women in the world to be the mother of his only living son!”

This sense of inevitability is compounded by a sense that both Susan and Rosemary are framed as complicit in the outcome, and thus are responsible for their own undoing, both by virtue of their actions and their inherent vulnerability. Lucy Fischer notes the way that the film’s narrative blames Rosemary rather than Guy’s greed and ambition for the outcome:

It is *she* who most wanted a child. (Even in her drugged stupor, she pleads to “make a baby.”) It is *she* who has arranged to live in the Bramford (despite its chilling reputation). It is *she* who has pushed intimacy with the Castavets. (Guy originally warned: “If we get friendly with an old couple . . . we’ll never get rid of them.”) Thus, the New Eve is charged with Original Sin. (“Birth Traumas” 9)

Susan’s complicity is presented as her decision to comply with Proteus’s demands so that he doesn’t incapacitate her through further “mental conditioning”, even though this dilemma offers no good outcome for her, for even when she realises that Proteus has

tricked her Alex stops her from killing the child. In his analysis of *Demon Seed* J. P. Telotte actively implicates Susan. He suggests that in the “rush to hand over the running of our lives to electronic brains” it is Susan’s willingness to embrace the use of a computer to “run her domestic world” that leads to her downfall (“Science Fiction Film” 103). However, this seems to entirely miss the point that the electronic house was of her *husband’s* devising, not hers, that she expresses reservations about the technology given her husband’s decision to leave the house after their separation, and that this “domestic world” is both her home and the place from which she runs her child psychology practice. Rather, her ‘bad’ choice is to keep living inside the house: “You do what you want, but I’m moving out,” says Alex; “Who’s going to run this thing when you’re gone?” the cook asks Alex, implying that Susan will be incapable of managing the house – and, perhaps, herself.

The violability of space in these films, coupled with this sense of inevitability, viscerally highlights the horrific nature of the relationship between the house as feminine domestic space, the female body as metaphorical house, and the feminisation of interior space. In *Demon Seed* and *Rosemary’s Baby* the house-home attacks and invades the house-body, which is necessarily always-already open for attack by the very virtue of its interiority. Elizabeth Grosz notes that “The ways in which space has been historically conceived have always functioned either to contain women or to obliterate them” (“Women, *Chora*, Dwelling” 55). However, in these instances the house collapses in *upon itself*, invalidating its own boundaries and borders, thus annihilating its own interior, such that women are inherently complicit in both their initial containment and their ultimate obliteration. This visually depicts not only how the conceptualisation of feminine corporeality as interior space offers woman no *place* – that is, no place of belonging, nor of ‘safe’ inviolable embodiment – but it bluntly indicates that for women this conceptualisation is dangerous, unsustainable and horrific. In her analysis of Irigaray’s spatial metaphors, Grosz indicates that the “containment of women within a dwelling which they did not build, which indeed was not even built for them, can only amount to homelessness within the very home itself” (“Women, *Chora*, Dwelling” 56) – that is, that the dominant construction of woman’s body as dwelling, as space, and as colonisable, violable interior offers a space and place for man but not for woman. As such, the deep ‘horror’ in these two horror films – indeed, the horror that is at the

centre of so many of the films that will be discussed over the course of this thesis – is not really the births of the monstrous children. Instead, the ‘dark truth’ (Curtis 11) is that Susan and Rosemary are so quickly and easily erased.

## RETHINKING SPACE

There are potential routes through this quandary - through the conceptualisation of physical, ‘feminised’ space as inherently violable. Irigaray asserts that to find or create her own place, woman must find a way to “re-envelop herself with herself, and do so at least twice: as a woman and as a mother” (*Ethics* 11), perhaps by “preserv[ing] her relation to *spatiality* and to the *fetal*” (*Ethics* 11, emphasis original) in a way that is not subsumed by a male nostalgia for the womb. The elimination of this nostalgia, in conjunction with an acknowledgement of women as embodied subjects and the acknowledgement of sex and love outside of pure procreation and maternal function, will allow men to create an identity that is not predicated on the inhabitation of feminine space and thus leave woman her place, which can lead to more respectful and more ethical relationships between men and women (Irigaray, *Ethics*). Another strategy is to radically reconsider the way that the body is conceptualised, so that the disavowal of interior maternal space that is inherent in the dominant metaphysical construction of corporeal space, in particular the myths of the in-divisible individual and the idealised male subject, is eliminated through necessary acknowledgement that we all have come from the body of a mother. Such a reconfiguration is further considered with regards to Christine Battersby’s feminist metaphysical project in chapter three of this thesis.

Another approach is to draw from utopian philosophies that seek to challenge and disrupt the binaries inherent in Western philosophy, as well as hegemonic constructions of sexuality, corporeality and power. For instance, taking a topographical approach to the body can eliminate the inside / outside binary inherent in mainstream discussions of sex, bodies and corporeality by rendering it meaningless. French post-structuralist philosopher Jean-François Lyotard’s philosophical reimagining of Freud’s constructions of sex, perversity and the libido, *Libidinal Economies*, begins with a description of the opening up or dismantling of the body into a libidinal surface, a “persuasive fiction” that “account[s] for the closures and exclusions inherent to re-

presentational thinking" (xii). He writes, "Open the so-called body and spread out all its surfaces... as though your dress-maker's scissors were opening the leg of an old pair of trousers" (1). All of this (ambiguously sexed) body's "zones" (2), from skin and muscle and organs, to the genitalia, vocal apparatus and nerves, are joined together into a band that "has no back to it", that is, a Moebius band. This "band "interests us not because it is closed but because it is one-sided" (2) for it has "neither exterior nor interior" (3); instead, it is a surface along which desire flows. Over and above its implications for a study of corporeality, I suggest that this elimination of the inside / outside dichotomy offers a new way of considering the visceral nature of the horror film, in particular the dissolution of the subject at the centre of torture films and body horror, and it presents a compelling challenge with regards to the way that it can be applied to discussions of the pregnant body within gynaehorror. This sort of subversive remapping of the body is also present in work by Gilles Deleuze and radical psychoanalyst Félix Guattari, which I considered in detail in chapter six of this thesis.

Each of these theoretical engagements offer creative ways of thinking about the body that can, in turn, be applied to the cinematic and horrific representation and expression of the body, and this selection is by no means exhaustive. Together they are indicative of the wide range of approaches that have thus far been neglected within horror scholarship. Such theoretical exploration can only enhance the study of the horror film, while offering a significant and fruitful departure from the split between sociologically-informed theories and Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic theories that have so far dominated this area of study. In turn, the introduction of areas of critical thought to the study of a popular genre opens up new areas of inquiry that further erode historic delineations between 'high' and 'low' culture.

Writing in 2002, Mark Jancovich suggests in his introduction to *Horror: A Film Reader* that

the horror film has taken over from the western as the genre that is most written about by genre critics... While this current academic interest suggests that the genre no longer has such a marginal status, if indeed it ever had one, the importance of horror goes far beyond this current intellectual fad. (1)

Without a doubt, the study of horror can be considered more than an "intellectual fad". However, just over ten years on from this statement, the theoretical underpinnings of

scholarship in horror - in terms of horror as a genre as well as horror films themselves as individual texts - have not diverged substantially from the broadly Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic models invoked in the late 1970s and early 1980s, especially in the study of women in horror. In addition, the tension between sociological and psychoanalytic models has had the unfortunate effect of constraining theoretical debate rather than opening up new areas of inquiry. As such, there is still a great deal of scope for the consideration of the way that horror films can be used in conjunction with critical theory to better explore the implications of both film and theory, particularly with regards to the way that images and stories of women, sex, bodies and reproduction play out in popular culture. To establish how key popular myths about female sex and sexuality circulate in the horror film, in the next chapter I consider some of the ways that horror films reflect and in some cases critique hegemonic attitudes towards heteronormative sexual expression through their portrayal of female virginity and carnality.



## CHAPTER TWO: ROSES AND THORNS

### VIRGINITY, *VAGINA DENTATA* AND FEMALE SEXUALITY

*She stands and moves within the invisible pentacle of her own virginity. She is an unbroken egg: she is a sealed vessel; she has inside her a magic space the entrance to which is shut tight with a plug of membrane; she is a closed system; she does not know how to shiver. She has her knife and she is afraid of nothing.*

Angela Carter, "The Company of Wolves", in *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (133)

**Jennifer:** *I think the singer wants me.*

**Needy:** *Only because he thinks you're a virgin. I heard them talking.*

**Jennifer:** *Yeah, right. I'm not even a back-door virgin anymore, thanks to Roman. By the way, that hurts. I couldn't even go to flags the next day. I had to stay home and sit on a bag of frozen peas.*

*Jennifer's Body* (Kusama US 2009)

In the previous chapter I advocated for an expansion of horror scholarship's theoretical repertoire. In this chapter, to provide a 'baseline' understanding for later theoretical discussions, I map dominant Western cultural myths about female sexuality and outline how these widespread and often taken-for-granted ideas about female (hetero)sexuality come to be represented and articulated in popular culture. Holland et al. argue that "the meanings of virginity and its 'loss', and the acquisition of heterosexual identities, continue to be socially gendered and differently embodied for men and women" (143), and I demonstrate how in horror film, myths about virginity – that is, chastity and contained female sexuality - are informed by, and in turn contribute to

normative and often very restrictive binary representations of heterosexual sexuality and femininity. However, the mythic construction of virginity does not exist in a vacuum; rather, the stereotype of the chaste, virtuous virgin, who is both victim and hero, is defined explicitly in opposition to unbounded carnal female sexuality. This sexuality, which is presented as monstrous and voracious, is represented in the horror film through allusions to the toothed vagina,<sup>1</sup> or *vagina dentata*, which in turn reflects profoundly negative and hostile attitudes towards women's genitalia. I argue that, for the most part, horror films engage with this binary construction of heteronormative female sexuality in an uncritical manner, very often relying upon such tropes as the feminised yet desexualised sacrificial virgin and the predatory, hypersexual vixen or she-demon. Moreover, in instances where there may be a greater degree of ambiguity, horror narratives force characters into these strict, sexualised roles. This uncritical and often conservative representation of women is an ongoing problem throughout the horror genre, and it is one that will continue to be referenced throughout this thesis. Nonetheless, popular culture is a dynamic site of struggle and contestation of meaning, and this chapter ends with an exploration of the effectiveness of the horror satire *Teeth*, a comparatively progressive film in which a sexually abstinent teenage girl discovers that her vagina has teeth.

## DEFINING VIRGINITY

Given the significance of virginity in the construction of female sexuality it is important to consider what exactly virginity is, for in popular parlance virginity is spoken about as if its definition – “the state of never having had sex” (Carpenter, “Virginity and Virginity Loss” 1673) – were natural and ahistorical. Virginity is less about being devoid of sexuality, but rather indicates an untapped or nascent sexuality. “Distinguishing between virgins and non-virgins is an ancient practice” (Carpenter, “Virginity and Virginity Loss” 1673), and virginity has been celebrated in myth and

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<sup>1</sup> To reflect popular usage, throughout this chapter I use the word “vagina” to describe the female genitalia, even though the word “vulva” is the anatomically correct term for the outer genitalia. Sara Rodrigues suggests that using popular terminology also helps to “release the vagina from anatomical language and, by extension, from the space and gaze of the clinic” (779) so as to incorporate both medical descriptions and cultural conceptions and perceptions of the entire female genitalia, which may serve to “promote a discursive politics that encourages women to employ the terms that best enable them to speak about their genitalia honestly and without shame” (779).

antiquity, such as in the ancient Greek veneration of virgin goddesses. The term is first found in written English near the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century with specific reference to pious, unmarried women who were celebrated by the Christian church; the first mentions in English of the Virgin Mary are likewise found around this time.<sup>2</sup> The association of the term with chastity and purity – that is, with the presumption of a lack of sexual activity and desire, as separated from its strictly ecclesiastic meaning – is first noted in the late 14<sup>th</sup> century (“Virgin”). The word ‘virgin’ comes from Latin root *virgo*, or maiden, and despite a long history of celibate male religious orders, in general the term has been applied almost exclusively to women (Blank 13).

More recent usage separates virgin from its specifically sexual sense, and comes to indicate a novice or someone naive or uninitiated in something, such as a ‘political virgin’; similarly, a ‘maiden voyage’ refers to a ship’s first outing. The term virgin also alludes to possession and alteration: virgin land is that which has not been explored or developed, a virgin city or fortress is one that has not been conquered, virgin forest has not yet been milled or felled, and virgin waters have not been sullied or fished. These terms imply both impending consumption or use, and given the conflation of virginity with femininity and women, they also signal a denial of female self-possession: Rebecca Whisnant posits that a “woman’s body cannot be her sovereign territory precisely because it is the “virgin” (at first) territory for someone else to conquer and annex” (Whisnant 161). These metaphors are indicative of the way that, within a patriarchal heterosexual framework, first sex begins with the penetration of the vagina by a man’s penis and ends with his orgasm (Holland et al. 146). Where sexual debut is the “young man’s moment” (Holland et al. 146), virginity is a passive state in which the female body has not (yet) been acted *upon*.<sup>3</sup>

Female virginity is discursively constructed as an embodied state for it is often defined anatomically with regards to the hymen, the small porous membrane that can cover all or part of the vaginal opening (or not even be present at all). While the presence of blood-spotting has long been an (unreliable) indicator of first penetrative

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<sup>2</sup> See Kristeva (“Stabat Mater”) for a discussion of the cult of the Virgin in Christianity. She asserts that the labelling of Mary as a virgin “was an error of translation: for the Semitic word denoting the social-legal status of an unmarried girl the translator substituted the Greek *parthenos*, which denotes a physiological and psychological fact, virginity” (135).

<sup>3</sup> See also Nicola Gavey’s discussions of heterosexuality, passivity and objectification in chapter three of *Just Sex? The Cultural Scaffolding of Rape*, in particular pages 104-5 and 112-4.

sex, the role of the hymen as a specific mark of virginity was first posited in the fourteenth century by the physician Michael Savonarola, who noted its rupture at the time of 'deflowering' (Blank 45). While the hymen exists in many terrestrial and aquatic species and is hypothesized to fulfil both reproductive and protective functions (Blackledge 145), the human hymen – named for both the Latin word for membrane (*himen*) and the Greek god of marriage rites – has acted as a cultural signifier for morality and female virtue, as evidenced by some of its colloquial and figurative names, such as 'maidenhead', 'veil of modesty' (Blackledge 143) and 'knot of virginity' (Blank 49). As Catherine Blackledge notes, the "hymen has, over the centuries, been invested with more social, moral and even legal significance than any other piece of human flesh" (142). Given the strong cultural imperative for women to manage their bodies in a way that is considered normatively (and, usually, heterosexually) desirable (Davis), it is unsurprising that the hymen becomes a site of both anxiety and mutability. Women who wish to have the hymens replaced, often for cultural reasons or to 'revirginise' themselves, can undergo hymenorrhaphy, a surgical reconstruction of the hymen.<sup>4</sup> There are less invasive means of intervention, too, for artificial hymens filled with small amounts of a substance resembling blood can be purchased for use as a sex aid or to fulfil a man's expectations of what 'should' happen as a part of first penile-vaginal penetration, such as in cultures where there is an expectation that a woman's first such penetration should occur on the wedding night.<sup>5</sup> One Chinese product, with the tongue-in-cheek name 'Joan of Arc Red', advises its users that the "effect will be better if the woman pretend feel pain and shy [sic]" ("Artificial Virginity Hymen (Joan of Arc Red)") so as to increase the alleged authenticity of the experience for the male sexual partner and reinforce the stereotype of the passive, inexperienced feminine virgin.

However, the (non-)existence of the hymen is at best a poor indication of virginity. Hymen inspection is an inadequate way of testing for evidence of penetrative sex as the hymen, depending on its size, position and shape, can be easily separated through medical examination, tampon use, masturbation or vigorous physical activity, and very small and flexible hymens can stay intact after intercourse. Amnesty International considers 'virginity tests', in which a woman's genitals are forcibly

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<sup>4</sup> For example, see the copy on the Turkish surgical website "Hymenoplasty Istanbul".

<sup>5</sup> See the post "can i use artificial hymen on my wedding night?"[sic] on the health forum SteadyHealth.com for a representative account.

inspected for evidence of a hymen, to be a contravention of a woman's human rights due to the reasons for testing, the invasive and undignified methods of testing and the negative and potentially life-threatening ramifications that it has for those who are tested and found wanting ("Women, Violence and Health"). That similar tests are not and cannot be performed upon men further demonstrates that virginity is more often deemed a female concern, albeit one that is monitored by both men and women alike. The way a woman's morality, chastity and worth, both physical and moral, can be so tied up in a mucous membrane is also indicative of the way in which women are considered to be more 'embodied' than men. While first heterosexual intercourse may be seen as an 'act' (and an accomplishment) for a man, women "enter first intercourse in a position of 'being', already constituted strongly *as* female bodies through their experiences of puberty and menstruation" (Potts 198; see also Holland et al. 145). Given these somewhat dubious physiological terms of reference, it follows that although virginity is often spoken about as an agreed-upon term, there is no one medical or diagnostic standard for virginity (J. Valenti 19); as Hanne Blank notes, "By any material reckoning, virginity doesn't exist" (Blank 3).

'Virginity', then, is a concept that is defined (and redefined) through discourse and practice in keeping with the dominant construction of human sexuality, which frames 'normal' (and 'real') sexual behaviour as heterosexual penile-vaginal intercourse (Potts 198): "If we do not engage in such activity we are not recognised as sexual beings, [and] we are still virgins after a lifetime of 'foreplay'" (Richardson 6). However, while it is ostensibly a straight-forward physiological issue, virginity is also associated with a degree of agency: it may be that your virginity is only 'gone' if you *want* it to be gone.<sup>6</sup> Given this association of virginity with willpower, it is perhaps unsurprising that virginity can also be reclaimed: the practice of 'born again virginity', which is largely associated with the evangelical Christian movement and abstinence-only education in the United States (Alexander), allows individuals to 'take back' their virginity by pledging abstinence until marriage, even if they have previously engaged in sexual activities. By framing virginity as a state of mind and a demonstration of piety, or even

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<sup>6</sup> Public online forums and advice columns are rich sites of inquiry for topics such as these. For instance, a post by a male participant on Yahoo! Answers titled "Am i still a virgin if i was raped"[sic] indicates the breadth of opinions over the phenomenological construction of virginity, with respondents' attitudes ranging from 'absolutely not', to 'virginity can only be lost consensually'; these answers reflect the sentiments articulated in many similar questions.

as an embodied, empowered act of self-love and self-control (Keller xiii-xix), individuals who have “already unwrapped the priceless gift of virginity and given it away” and who “feel like ‘second-hand goods’ and no longer worthy to be cherished” can “re-wrap it and give it only to [their] future husband or wife” (“Pregnancy Support Center: Take2 Renewed Virginity”). Thus, virginity is framed as both an actual thing that can be ‘lost’ or ‘given’ as well as a process, a rite of passage, a destination<sup>7</sup> and a state of being, but the popular idea that virginity both exists and is ‘lost’ through penile-vaginal penetrative sex is one based upon a heterosexual, able-bodied bias that ignores the wealth and breadth of possible sexual expression. Thus, virginity is a term that is widely utilised and seemingly ‘agreed upon’ but rarely adequately defined, and I argue that it is exactly this nebulousness that makes it a conceptually powerful touchstone in popular media narratives about sex.

What is not in question, though, is the way that female virginity is fetishised and constructed as a mythic ideal – something that is apparent in the number of pornographic websites that play on notions of youth and purity. These range from sites who claim their models to be ‘barely legal’, to those presenting young women’s (alleged) first times on camera, to those that offer scenes of ‘defloration’, complete with pre-coitus images of the models’ hymens and mid- and post-coitus images of blood spotting. These sites play on the signifiers of girlhood, featuring soft toys, child-like costumes and sets that are dressed to resemble girls’ bedrooms, while eschewing raunchy lingerie and hypersexualised settings. The website Defloration.tv, for instance, promises a “unique opportunity to see what you missed when get married [sic]... *Defloration* performance,” and “cute virgin girls, hymen photos, juicy teen pussies, real videos, real stories... No scripts! Only real emotions shot on-the-fly!” (“Defloration - Defloration Video and Photo!”) The narratives of this subgenre of pornography promise a ‘legitimate’ experience of conquering and consuming a young woman’s body in a manner that is mythologised as authentic yet constructed as performative in that it offers the (presumably male) viewer an empowering fantasy of domination and the bestowal of sexual education.<sup>8</sup> The ‘defloration’ is framed as for the exclusive benefit of the viewer,

<sup>7</sup> For a further exploration of the ‘journey’ of virginity loss, see Laura Carpenter’s study of 61 young Americans’ first sexual encounters in *Virginity Lost: An Intimate Portrait of First Sexual Experiences*.

<sup>8</sup> This is not to imply that men are the only consumers of pornography; rather, it can be readily assumed that given these narrative descriptions on the site, and the emphasis upon inspecting a woman’s genitals before, during and after penetrative penile-vaginal sex, that the site at least intends to portray a

and marks women's bodies and (alleged) virginities as available for purchase and consumption, while the emphasis on "real emotions" evokes the sense of a momentous occasion. Anna North, a columnist for American feminist lifestyle blog Jezebel.com, points out that "our culture still prizes unwilling or faux-unwilling female sexual partners"; conquest narratives in virgin porn continue to illustrate this by framing the penetration of a 'closed' female body as a form of achievement that valorises active male sexuality (Potts 198-9) while treating the virginal body as something to be ruptured, violated, invaded and owned by men (Potts 204).

## VIRGINITY IN THE HORROR FILM

The female virgin holds a privileged place in the horror film. In their 1996 exploration of gendered experiences of (hetero)sexual debut, Holland et al. point out that "the acquisition of sexual identities is increasingly detached from moral discourses of purity and sin" (143). Yet, these discourses remain deeply ingrained within horror narratives: a quantitative content analysis of slasher films conducted in 2010 showed that female characters who engaged in sexual behaviour were not only less likely to survive than their non-sexual female peers and their male peers, but that their death scenes were significantly longer (Welsh). The notability of the virginity is well-referenced in the film *Scream* (Craven US 1996), a tongue-in-cheek post-modern slasher that is as interested in overtly acknowledging horror tropes as it is in fulfilling and sometimes undermining them as a narrative conceit. In a typically intertextual moment, the aptly named virginal film geek Randy Meeks outlines the conventions of the horror film to a crowded room of party-goers who are watching director John Carpenter's 1978 slasher *Halloween*:

**Randy:** There are certain rules that one must abide by in order to successfully survive a horror movie. For instance, number one: you can never have sex.

*[the teenagers boo]*

**Randy:** Big no no! Big no no! Sex equals death, okay? Number two: you can never drink or do drugs.

*[the teenagers cheer and raise their bottles]*

**Randy:** The sin factor! It's a sin. It's an extension of number one.

As evidence, Randy cites actress Jamie Lee Curtis's roles as a virginal 'scream queen' in a series of early slasher films: *Halloween*, *The Fog* (Carpenter US 1980), *Terror Train* (Spottiswoode US-CAN 1980), *Prom Night* (Lynch CAN 1980), *Halloween II* (Rosenthal US 1981) and *Road Games* (Franklin AUS 1982). When another party-goer announces that he wants to see Curtis's breasts, Randy replies "Breasts? Not until *Trading Places* in 1983. Jamie Lee was always a virgin in horror movies. She didn't show her tits 'til she went legit."<sup>9</sup> This wry commentary on the nature of sex in the horror film occurs while the film's heroine, Sidney, is upstairs preparing to lose her virginity to her boyfriend Billy, who is later revealed to be one of the killers. However, despite losing her virginity and escaping death, she still stands in for the first of two key virgin stereotypes: the virgin hero.

## THE VIRGIN HERO

The virgin hero is a staple trope in films that correlate sex with death, such as those associated with the slasher genre, in large part because of its prominence in *Halloween*; as Adam Rockoff, author of *Going to Pieces: The Rise and Fall of the Slasher Film, 1978 – 1986*, states, "It is difficult to overestimate the [film's] importance ... It is the blueprint for all slashers and the model against which all subsequent films are judged" (55). As such, the film is also extensively cited by Carol J. Clover in her formulation of the Final Girl in *Men, Women and Chain Saws*. She demonstrates how Curtis's character, Laurie Strode (a name that is both masculine and dynamic), takes on a more assertive role than women in similar films, such as survivor Sally in the original *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (Hooper US 1974); where Sally ran, screamed and exhibited little agency, Laurie actively fights back, and although Laurie herself is rescued from villain Michael

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<sup>9</sup> When Randy escapes murder in *Scream*, he proclaims that he never thought he'd be so happy to be a virgin. However, he is killed in *Scream 2* (Craven US 1997), and in *Scream 3* (Craven US 2000) – through a taped video diary he'd left behind – he states that should he be killed, having "giv[en] up [his] virginity to Karen Kolchec at the video store was probably not a good idea."



Myers' silent predation by Michael's psychiatrist, who shoots Michael repeatedly in the head and chest in the film's climax, her successors often make the killing blow themselves. These Final Girls, as Clover terms them, are important because they are set apart from the other women of the films. They are given masculine interests, demonstrate sexual reluctance, and are marked as something other than their female peers (48), often by bearing masculine names (40). They are watchful, resourceful, responsible and intelligent, and developed in more psychological detail than their peers (44). They look *for* the killer, and rather than running, they confront the monster face to face (44). The Final Girl is special precisely because of her sexual other-ness and the way that she relinquishes her femininity and any trappings of overt sexuality. This means that even as female characters have developed and become more sexually active in horror films, and as the trope is subverted, recycled or parodied in postmodern and millennial horrors, the Final Girls are still presented as different from – both less than and more than – the other female characters.<sup>10</sup>

The virgin hero of the horror film can be further understood through Andrea Dworkin's radical feminist account of Joan of Arc, which marks Joan as someone who eschewed the trappings of womanhood – not only her dress and subservience, but her 'to-be-fucked-ness'. For Joan and the virgin saints who appeared to her in divine visions, "virginity was an active element of a self-determined integrity, an existential independence... not a retreat from life but an active engagement with it; dangerous and confrontational because it repudiated rather than endorsed male power over women" (A. Dworkin 96). Dworkin's interpretation of Joan marks her as able to achieve in the world by bypassing male desire through the repudiation of everything that marked her as Woman – most notably her denial of a woman's dress and appearance and her

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<sup>10</sup> In recent films, literal virginity may be replaced by more metaphorical types of virginity, such as sexual reluctance, other forms of "innocence", or even just a heightened awareness or intelligence, so that the female hero is still presented as other to her female peers, a move that still conflates hypersexuality or hyperfemininity with stupidity and 'kill-ability': in the reimagining of *Halloween* (Zombie US 2007), Laurie is recast as Michael Myers' little sister, and the film and its sequel are presented more as an exploration of family dysfunction. In *Hostel: Part II* (Roth US 2007) the apparently virginal and innocent Final Girl is shown to be just as bloodthirsty as the killers, and she chooses to join them rather than succumb. In the horror comedy *You're Next* (Wingard US 2011), the Final Girl's resourcefulness acts as a key plot element: Erin was brought up by survivalists in the Australian desert and is more than equipped to fight back violently against the masked home invaders, much to the shock of her boyfriend who had secretly engineered the attack. See my discussion later regarding postmodern subversion of the trope.

engagement in activities associated with men and militarisation, to the extent that her gender was called into question (MacLachlan 11). This is also a disavowal of everything that the concept of Woman meant – property, sexual availability, recalcitrance, submissiveness, accessibility and social inferiority: “she refused to be fucked and she refused civil insignificance: and it was one refusal; a rejection of the social meaning of being female in its entirety, no part of the feminine exempted or saved” (A. Dworkin 85) While the virgin hero of the horror film does not reach the extremes of Joan, she certainly takes on a mantle of masculinity and disavows aspects of her femininity, and her refusal of (or inexperience with) sex acts as both nexus and signifier of her power and difference.

### **THE SACRIFICIAL VIRGIN**

As Joan of Arc’s martyrdom indicates, the importance of virginity and the ideals implicitly bound up within it are further demonstrated in the second key articulation of female virginity in the horror film: the trope of the sacrificial virgin, which itself is as old as prehistory (H. Parker 74). In these instances, the victim is almost invariably an attractive adolescent or young woman, indicating that sexual capital is as important as the state of virginity. While a child or older virgin could, hypothetically, fulfil the same requirements of virginity, it is the destruction of nascent sexuality that lends itself towards the notion of sacrifice. Hanne Blank indicates that there are different types of virginity: children have a ‘default virginity’, and are considered, to borrow from Jung, presexual (13); nuns or other religious celibates are considered “vowed virgins” (16). However, adolescent virginity can be qualified not as perpetual but as “transitional virginity”, which relies on the assumption that “people will become players in the game of sex” and eventually procreate. This marks adolescent virginity (and virginity loss) as a passage that links childhood’s end to the beginnings of adulthood (14). It is at this point that “virginity really begins to count for something” (13) – the destruction of an attractive, fertile “transitional” virgin is a loss in the present and in the future, for with the death of the virgin comes not only an offering of inviolate purity and sanctity, but the nullification of future children and the perpetuation of the family line. The life and

body of the virgin becomes a commodity to be traded for civic protection or success, or to appease or please gods or monsters.

Historically, fantasy films have reinforced the modern filmic stereotype of the sacrificial virgin. In these stories, the women to be sacrificed are presented as passive, naive and available to be consumed or destroyed. Visually, they are attractive and young, and are often chained to rocks or stakes in a way that alludes to fantasies of domination and submission, something that is reinforced by their screaming, ineffectual struggles to be free. In both the sword-and-sorcery fantasy epics *Conan the Barbarian* (Milius US 1982) and *Conan the Destroyer* (Fleischer US 1984) the titular barbarian saves virgin princesses from the hands of cultists; in the latter film, the virgin was both able to summon the monster through acquiring a special and highly suggestive magic horn, and was to placate the monster through being devoured. In *Clash of the Titans* (Davis US 1981), demigod Perseus must rescue Andromeda from being sacrificed to the Kraken, an ancient sea monster. *Dragonslayer* (Robbins US 1981) features a village that, twice-yearly, must sacrifice a virgin to a nearby dragon so as to save their village; the dragon's snapping teeth are, ironically, an image of monstrous female carnality – a point to which I will return. In each of these instances, the virginal female is a “reservoir of energy ... that could serve patriarchy” (MacLachlan 8) and “a substitute for all the members of the community, offered up by the members themselves” (H. Parker 75), yet also presented in a manner that conforms to normative constructions of attractiveness, so that the virgin is as much for the visual consumption of the ideal heterosexual male viewer as she is for the literal consumption of the monster.

Virgins retain this special nature in horror films about black magic and monsters, even in instances where sacrifice itself is less overt than it is implied; for example, in *Sleepwalkers* (Garris US 1992), the eponymous shapeshifting werewolves need to feed on the life-force of virgin women to stay alive. Early horror films combine the demands of an audience and the Hollywood star system for attractive female starlets by featuring unwed young women who discover and are pursued by the monster. *The Phantom of the Opera* (Julian et al. US 1925), which is discussed in chapter one, is perhaps the most explicit narrative featuring a virgin ‘taming’ (or attempting to tame) a monster, while *King Kong* (Cooper US 1933) and other early RKO and Universal films explore similar material. In Bram Stoker's widely adapted nineteenth century novel *Dracula*, which

conflates vampirism with sexuality, both newlywed Mina Harker and the ingénue Lucy are virgins; depending on the film adaptation in question, Lucy's transformation into a vampire awakens in her a carnal bloodlust that stands in contrast to her former demure figure.<sup>11</sup>

By framing it in terms of consumption and commodity, a woman's virginity cannot be seen as a private or personal issue; indeed, virginity can be socially constructed as a community concern in which the body of the girl or woman becomes abstracted and conflated with broader entities or attributes. Holt N. Parker indicates that "Feminine virtue was used in antiquity as a sign of the moral health of the commonwealth as commonly as it is in some places today" (66; see also 69). He recalls the Vestal virgins of ancient Rome, whose chastity was directly linked to the wellbeing of the Roman state. As Vestals were both daughters of and embodiments of Rome, sexual congress with them was considered an incestuous act of treason. The Vestals' punishment for breaking their vow of chastity was to be buried alive with a small amount of food - a necessarily passive-aggressive method of execution for it was illegal for a citizen to spill their blood or actively contribute to their death (H. Parker; see also M. Dowling). This sense of collective ownership is bluntly expressed in the wryly named *Cherry Falls* (Wright US 2000), in which young virgins in the eponymous town are being murdered by an apparently female killer. The high school students decide to "take themselves off the endangered species list" by staging a school-wide orgy, which is presented like a distorted, bacchanalian school prom - the amalgamation of one adolescent rite of passage with another. The killer, a teacher, is the illegitimate son of a woman who 25 years prior lost her virginity when she was raped by four young men, including the father of the lead female - a 'sins of the fathers' story that echoes other teen horrors such as *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (Craven US 1984) and *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* (Cunningham US 1980) (Falconer 136). The killer's peculiar revenge for his mother's violation is to rob the *parents* of their children's virginities. The horror, according to the film's logic, is less for the students than it is for the wealthy parents who can do everything for their children except safeguard their 'innocence'. Here, the teenagers' collective virginity is a signifier of both good parenting and wholesome small town values, and so long as this social facade is maintained it masks a bitter historic truth.

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<sup>11</sup> Andrea Dworkin offers an indepth radical feminist reading of the virginities of Mina and Lucy in her book *Intercourse* (170-9).

## MALE VIRGINITY: HUMOUR AND HORROR

Female virgins are presented as sacrifice and hero, and I argue that male virgins in horror film, while much rarer than their female counterparts, also fall into two distinct varieties. Where virginal women are marked as passive victim or victim hero, the femininity that is inherent in the construction of virginity leaves the male virgin two forms of representation, the first of which is weakness. Holland et al. assert that “heterosexual ‘first sex’ is an induction into adult masculinity for young men” (144), but given cultural associations of masculinity with activeness and power and femininity with passivity and subordination, a lack of sexual activity is inherently coded as weakness that must be endured or overcome. American sex comedies such as the *Porky’s* (Clark US-CAN 1982) and its sequels or, more recently, *The 40 Year Old Virgin* (Apatow US 2005), mine the comedic loss-of-virginity trope mercilessly. Teen coming-of-age comedy *American Pie* (C. and P. Weitz US 1999)<sup>12</sup> around four boys’ quest to lose their virginities before their senior prom, to become ‘complete’ men before leaving the adolescence of high school and moving into the world. The film, a “humorous critique of the social and sexual inadequacy of straight, white masculinity” (Craig and Fradley 89), centres on the boys’ idea that graduating high school without having had sex is an appalling proposition – as every-man protagonist Jim puts it, “you realize we’re all going to go to college as virgins. They probably have special dorms for people like us.” Where “[female] virginity is in not yet having been subsumed: one’s being is still intact, penetrated or not” (A. Dworkin 113), male virginity is seen as a type of incompleteness. So, when Jim loses his virginity to a sexually aggressive female peer who was only interested in a one night stand, he expresses delight that he was ‘used’, for despite lacking agency he has nonetheless successfully achieved manhood (see Holland et al. 146-152).<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> The film’s suggestive tagline is “There’s something special about your first piece”.

<sup>13</sup> Despite this inauspicious beginning – which, had the genders been switched, would have perhaps read as explicitly rather than implicitly abusive (see n13) – Jim and Michelle pursue a relationship in *American Pie 2* (Rogers US 2001) and then get married in the third film, *American Wedding* (Dylan US-GER 2003), thus reinstating a normative heterosexual relationship. Nonetheless, the emphasis on male sexual ‘prowess’ and the imperative to lose one’s virginity at any cost continue through the franchise’s direct-to-video spin-off titles, of which there are four at time of writing.

Male virginity is a rare plot or character element in the horror film, and when it does appear it is predominantly associated with this sense of impaired masculinity. Carol J. Clover asserts that “traditional masculinity does not fare well in the slasher film” (*Chain Saws* 65) – but when it comes to narratives about sex in the horror film, neither does non-traditional masculinity. Instead virginity is framed as a dangerous state of ignorance, with the implication that if a man is not inducted into manhood through penetrative sex, he remains open for attack. The male virgin of horror comedy *Once Bitten* (Storm US 1985), Mark, is frustrated because his girlfriend isn’t yet ready to have sex, so he starts trawling singles bars where he is picked up by a vampire Countess. She needs his blood to stay youthful and in turn Mark starts exhibiting vampiric qualities, but he is eventually rescued by his girlfriend who quickly and uncomfortably ‘devirginises’ him, thus making him useless to the Countess. In this case, the loss of virginity is imperative – any notion of romance or love is stripped away from the sex act, and it becomes a way to thwart the Countess’s appetite rather than a way for Mark and his previously-reticent girlfriend to solidify their relationship. While virginity loss, at the outset of the film, is framed (for his girlfriend) as something meaningful and worth waiting for, the film ratifies the idea that men’s virginity is something to be actively cast away – not only is it shameful, but it is worth cheating on one’s partner for, and is something inherently dangerous that must be hurried and done away with.

However, the effeminacy that is conflated with male virginity is sometimes framed as a virtue as well as a weakness, for without this achievement of normative heterosexual manhood there is also if not an outright rejection of, then at least a deep ambivalence about the negative or harmful aspects of normative masculinity – such as violence, domination and sexism –and the socially and culturally dominant construction of what it is and means to be a man. In *Borderland* (Berman US-MEX 2009), college student Phil is nearly goaded by his boorish friends into losing his virginity to a prostitute in a brothel on the Mexican-American border. He reneges, but is then abducted and used as a human sacrifice by a group of drug smuggling cultists. Phil is an apt sacrifice because he is presented as less masculine than his friends: he is feminised through his care for the wellbeing of ‘his’ prostitute and her child, as well as for the way that he ‘values’ his virginity enough to not want to have his first penetrative sexual experience with a sex worker, and as such he is presented as a ‘good’ guy.

This association is also present in *Decoys* (Hastings CAN 2004), in which two male college students who are desperate to lose their virginity discover that many of the beautiful women on campus are refugee aliens who are seeking hosts for their offspring. The women impregnate their male hosts by penetrating them with tentacles that sprout from their chests – a process that fatally freezes the men from the inside out. Wiseacre Roger discovers that he has a ‘sensitive side’ and takes on a traditionally feminine role when he tries to convince his alien love interest, (the ironically named) Constance, to wait until the right moment before she takes his virginity. Even though Constance has developed feelings for Roger and tries to ‘go easy’ on him, he barely survives the impregnation process and dies shortly thereafter.<sup>14</sup> Both Roger and Phil are presented much more caring and respectful than their friends and classmates, but for them both sex and virginity are dangerous – a double bind that indicates a great deal of anxiety about both the nature and performance of normative masculinity.

While these films identify male virginity with both an impaired sense of masculinity and as a physical weakness, the deliberate act of (sexual) self-denial can be coded as a sign of strength, which I argue leaves the only alternative to impaired masculinity in the horror film as complete disavowal of desire. Pete Falconer suggests that while the titular vampire-human hybrid hero of *Blade* (Norrington US 1998) and its two sequels is not presented as a sexual virgin *per se*, his disinterest in sex, and his active repression of his need for human blood, give the image of a man who is militantly denying his baser needs (128-30). This denial is also present in religious representations of abstinence in the horror film, such as in *The Wicker Man* (Hardy UK 1973), where celibacy is a sign of strength. A young, religious and celibate Police Sergeant Neil Howie is lured to the Hebridean island of Summerisle by the island’s inhabitants by way of a bogus missing persons case, where he is to be sacrificed on May

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<sup>14</sup> Interestingly, the film (like *American Pie*) does not address the notion of rape. The female aliens have, effectively, killed their male victims by forcibly penetrating them, but each act is framed in a way that shifts responsibility from the aggressor to the victim. In each case the male victim is sexually active and forward, and the overwhelming feeling is that the men who are killed by the aliens were in part complicit in their deaths due to their sexual activity and their leering objectification of the aliens, perhaps in the same way that young women are often unfairly labelled as partially responsible for sexual assaults if they are, for instance, provocatively dressed or sexually active. Further, it is made clear that up until the point of impregnation the male victims were enjoying themselves, playing on the assumption that men ‘can’t’ be raped. It is for this reason that Roger is not immediately killed: because of his sexual reticence, he is deemed to be ‘different’ to (and less aggressively masculine than) the other men, who are considered boorish and lustful, and therefore disposable. See chapter seven of Nicola Gavey’s *Just Sex?* for a considered discussion of how women’s sexual coercion of men is culturally and socially framed.

Day in a giant, burning wicker man to the island's pagan gods so as to restore the island's ailing orchards. Howie represents the perfect sacrifice, according to the Lord of the island, as he came willingly, as a virgin, as a representative of the king (as a policeman representing the Crown) and as a fool. The film ends with the islanders joyfully singing an old English hymn while the Howie shouts Psalm 23 from his burning wicker cage.

However, Howie's presence is indicative of more things than just his virginity: he is active, strong and a representative of the law and authority. His devout religious beliefs stand in contrast to those of the islanders, and we are asked to compare their actions and beliefs: where they are sexual, fecund and permissive, he is guarded and physically aloof; where they place their beliefs in old gods, sexual energies and supernatural rituals, he has an unwavering faith in paternalistic, conservative Christianity. Howie is no passive feminised sacrifice for his virginity and his faith give him strength, and his solid Christian 'goodness' serves to increase the horror of his demise at the hands of the pagans, leaving viewers to watch as the moral and spiritual cornerstones of British society are undermined and cast away. Howie dies as a martyr, not a victim – and notably, it is exceedingly difficult to find filmic accounts of female virginal martyrdom in horror film that evoke such ideas of strength.

## **VIRGINITY AND GENERIC COMPULSION**

These virginal categories – the female sacrificial victim, the victim-hero, the deficient man and the masculine ascetic – have come to be fixed generic types, although they are increasingly acknowledged in a knowing, ironic and media-literate manner. However, even in critiquing and playing with these tropes, I argue that postmodern horror films nonetheless seem compelled to fulfil them. This is apparent in *The Cabin in the Woods* (Godard US 2012), which like *Scream* is interested in exposing and deconstructing horror film tropes. The film posits that five American horror film archetypes – the jock, the scholar, the slut, the fool and the virgin – must be sacrificed every year to appease a Lovecraftian elder god. This is achieved through a ritual that plays out much like a stereotypical slasher film: the five 'inadvertently' unleash a specific monster by playing with one of many artefacts found in the cabin's basement,



and are then terrorised and killed one by one – in this instance, by a family of redneck zombies who are summoned when Dana, the virgin, reads aloud from a young girl's mouldering diary. As such Dana is at once transgressor, virgin hero and sacrificial victim. The people orchestrating the sacrifice point out that the virgin must be the last alive, to live or die as fate sees fit, but that what matters is that she visibly suffers for the benefit of the watching gods and, by proxy, the viewer, who is implicated in the film's violence and voyeurism.

However, Dana is certainly not a virgin - she has been having an affair with her college professor – and she and the others, who begin as diverse and well-rounded characters, are shoehorned into their archetypal roles through drugs, tricks and environmental conditioning; rather, we are told drolly that the 'puppetmasters' must "work with what [they] have". The film bluntly questions the necessity of the youthful, attractive Final Girl and her personification of abject terror (Clover, *Chain Saws* 35), and at the film's close, Dana and Marty, the pot-smoking fool, decide not to fulfil the ritual, if such a brutal practice is what it takes to keep the world alive. Joss Whedon, one of the film's creators, describes the film as a "very loving hate letter" to the sorts of horror films that they consider have "sung [sic] a little too far in [the] direction" of sadistic torture porn ("Joss Whedon talks *The Cabin in the Woods*") – but the film nonetheless (and, perhaps, necessarily) fulfils exactly the parameters that they wish to critique through the production and distribution of a critically and financially successful horror film that succeeds through its objectification and punishment of attractive young women.

## FROM VIRGIN TO *VAGINA DENTATA*

The chaste sacrificial virgin is only one side of the dyadic form of the sexed woman in horror: the obverse is what happens when the female virgin's nascent sexuality is released. In *Jennifer's Body* a struggling and fairly unmemorable band of indie rock musicians decide to advance their fortunes by making a deal with the devil and sealing it with the sacrifice of a virgin. At a small town gig they set their sights on Jennifer, an extremely attractive and hyper-sexualised cheerleader from the local high school. Jennifer lies about her sexual status, initially to appear coquettish to the lead

singer and then later, when she is taken away by the band and begins to fear that she has been abducted for sex. However, she has been sexually active since middle school and is not even a “back door virgin”, as she puts it, and as such the sacrifice goes terribly wrong. While the band receives their boon and head towards stardom, Jennifer comes back from death: her body absorbs the summoned demon and she becomes a succubus. She must devour men approximately once a month to satisfy her hunger and maintain her appearance, which moves after her feeding from supernaturally radiant and beautiful to lacklustre, wan and spotty over the course of a few weeks; the needs of her inner demon are freely equated with the ways in which women’s bodies can be affected by their menstrual cycle, and her ‘withdrawal symptoms’ mimic those of a drug addict. When Jennifer seduces and feasts on her male schoolmate victims she adopts her demon form: she has an enormous snake-like articulated jaw that is lined with sharp teeth with which she tears off the genitals of her victims. This image of her dangerous, gaping maw (fig. 2.1) is a symbolic representation of the other, more dangerous and unruly side of female sexuality: the *vagina dentata*, or toothed vagina.

If the virgin can be considered a hermetic or closed system, the *vagina dentata* plays on anxieties surrounding unbounded female sexual power and desire, the interiority of the female genitals, the origins of life and the mechanics of birth, as well as acting as a cautionary tale about the dangers of sex with unknown women. Mythologist Joseph Campbell points out that “The universal goddess makes her appearance to men



**Fig. 2.1 Shedding her skin:** Jennifer attacks one of her male schoolmates, revealing her succubus form and hinged jaw (*Jennifer's Body*).

under a multitude of guises... The mother of life is at the same time the mother of death” (302-3). The *vagina dentata* is a primal and ancient construct of femininity: Erich Neumann, in his work on the archetypes of the Great Mother, indicates that this “destructive side of the Feminine... appears most frequently in the archetypal form of a mouth bristling with teeth” (qtd. in Rees 222). Elizabeth Grosz aligns the destructive horror of the mythic *vagina dentata* with the abject:

It is clear, to me at least, that this horror of submersion, the fear of being absorbed into something which has no boundaries of its own, is not a property of the viscous itself; in keeping with Douglas’s claims about dirt, what is disturbing about the viscous or the fluid is its refusal to conform to the laws governing the clean and proper.... (*Volatile Bodies* 194-5)

Barbara Creed offers an in depth psychoanalytic account of the *vagina dentata* (*The Monstrous-Feminine* 105-121) in which she argues that Freud’s conceptualisation of Medusa’s head, with her fanged mouth, hair of phallic, fetishistic serpents (111) and ‘stiffening’ gaze, is a clear expression of the castration anxiety that is evoked by the female genitals, be it a literal castration or a symbolic one, such as the loss of the mother’s body or a loss of identity (107). She also asserts that the castrating function of the *vagina dentata* plays into fears of orality – firstly, the oral sadistic mother who is feared by her children who imagine that as much as they gain pleasure from feeding from her, she will gain pleasure in feeding on them, and secondly the dyadic, pre-Oedipal mother who threatens symbolically to engulf the infant, thus obliterating them (109).

Motifs recalling the *vagina dentata* are prevalent in myths and stories from around the world (Caputi 28). In Māori legend, Hine-nui-te-pō – the ‘great woman of night’ and queen of the underworld – has gnashing teeth of obsidian in her vagina. Trickster-hero Maui attempts to make humankind immortal by climbing up inside her vagina while she sleeps, reversing birth; however she is awoken by a bird laughing at Maui and crushes him with her thighs, bringing death into the world (Kahukiwa and Grace 58). Related myths feature women with snakes, eels, carnivorous fish or dragons in their vaginas, or stories of women or goddesses who, like the Lamia, look like beautiful women from the waist up, but from the waist down resemble monstrous beasts (Blackledge 168). The fairy tale Briar Rose – more commonly known as Sleeping Beauty – portrays a beautiful maiden surrounded by a seemingly impassable forest of thorns; by conquering these teeth and breaking through the dangerous entrance, the

hero is rewarded with the young woman, whose name references the long-standing association of the images of roses with female genitalia and sexuality (Bernau 74-7).

*Vagina dentata* features in modern myths, too:<sup>15</sup> Karen L. Pliskin discusses how the the *vagina dentata* is invoked as a metaphor when women's sexuality is demonised, such as in the transmission of sexually transmitted infections, particularly those, like genital herpes, that may be asymptomatic for the carrier. She cites imagery in wartime posters which identified women as the source of venereal disease and men as their unsuspecting victims, such as:

the famous American World War II poster geared to soldiers, in which Hitler and Mussolini are linking arms with a tall woman who has a smiling skeletal face. Written at the top of the poster, in big letters flanking the woman's head, is "V.D." The woman, holding her head back defiantly while marching with Hitler and Mussolini, wears a sleeveless clinging dress and high heels. [...] Written at the bottom of the poster is, "Worst of the three" - referring to the VD woman. (491)

Other such Allied wartime posters framed women and their sexed bodies as weapons of war, and featured catch phrases such as "Fool the axis! Use prophylaxis!", "Juke joint sniper: syphilis and gonorrhea", and "'Innocent looks" and medical "certificates" may be booby traps that cover up V. D. mines. Don't take chances" (O Williams). Similarly, Monte Gulzow and Carol Mitchell demonstrate how such folk tales proliferated among soldiers who fought in the Viet Nam war, who recounted stories of Vietnamese women, predominantly prostitutes, putting razorblades, sand, ground glass or even grenades in their vaginas; one active serviceman stated "I always put my finger in first. If I pulled back a bloody nub I knew not to stick anything else in there" (308). The ur-story of these myths involves the removal or taming of the teeth by the hero, thereby neutralising the active danger of the female body, before he can be rewarded with his prize – docile female sexuality (Beit-Hallahmi 355).

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<sup>15</sup> See F. K. Taylor for a medical discussion of "penis captivus" and its relationship to vaginismus, a painful spasm or contraction of the vagina that can make penetrative intercourse difficult or impossible.

## REPRESENTING THE VAGINA: ART AND APPEARANCE

These myths indicate not only a deep dis-ease about women's sexuality, but also reflect broader attitudes towards the vagina that are well-represented in contemporary accounts. Psychologists Virginia Braun and Sue Wilkinson note that there are many conflicting and paradoxical meanings associated with the vagina, stating that "the vagina is, among other things, the toothed and dangerous *vagina dentata*; the (symbolic) absence of a penis; the core of womanhood; and a symbol of reproduction" (Braun and Wilkinson 17). In their broad-spectrum analysis of the socio-cultural representations of the vagina, they chart the ways in which it is portrayed as inferior to the penis, a passive receptacle for the penis, sexually inadequate, vulnerable and abused, smelly, dangerous to both men and infants, and disgusting. Such a depressing portrayal, they note, "needs to be challenged in order to promote women's sexual and reproductive health" (25). Such negative (and normalised) portrayals of the vagina and of the female reproductive and sexual body as a whole are recognised and ratified in the horror film, which offers very little in the way of positive or affirmative representation. Rather, the horror genre looks to the vagina as a place of disgust, monsters, terror and dangerously unbridled sexuality.

While the image of the penis is usually unremarkable within artistic contexts, the image of the vagina is often considered taboo and pornographic. A key example is the work of Australian artist Greg Taylor, whose 2009 Adelaide exhibition *CUNTS... and other conversations* featured 141 'porcelain portraits' – sculptures of the genitals of women ranging in age from 18 – 78. The exhibition came under heavy criticism for its allegedly offensive and pornographic content, and postcards advertising the exhibition were considered so vulgar that Australian Post banned them and warned Taylor that he was in breach of Commonwealth law (see fig. 2.2). The life-like images were even argued to be degrading to women themselves – the conservative Australian Family Association's spokeswoman Gabrielle Walsh condemned the exhibition, saying that there was no excuse for the "c-word" to be used in public, and that Taylor "shouldn't be allowed to force these images and words upon us in public for all to view, including children... It's an abuse of public space and women, in particular, would find them deeply offensive" (Nankervis). This stands in direct contrast to the attitudes of the models: "All of them want one thing; for young women to be free of growing up with



**Fig. 2.2 Banned publicity material:** Advertising material for sculptor Greg Taylor's exhibition *CUNTS ...and other conversations* ("Bits & Pieces").

fear, ignorance and loathing of their bodies and sexuality" ("New Greg Taylor Exhibition"). "It's all about the word," Taylor said in 2009, regarding his precursor exhibition in Melbourne, asking "why is it that in our culture the most vile and disgusting thing is perceived to be a cunt?" (Kizilos)

The controversy echoes the concerns raised about Judy Chicago's iconic and monumental 1979 installation *The Dinner Party*, which featured 39 ceramic sculptures of vaginas placed at 'settings' around a large triangular table. The 39 'guests', accompanied by 999 tiles 'women of achievement', represent both historical and mythical female figures, ranging from Hindu goddess Kali, Babylonian goddess Ishtar and the pre-historic primordial goddess, to modern feminist icons such as novelist Virginia Woolf, poet Emily Dickinson and artist Georgia O'Keeffe.<sup>16</sup> The work utilises forms of arts and crafts traditionally associated with women and domesticity and aims

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<sup>16</sup> See "The Dinner Party" for a full list of figures represented.

to counter the often invisible place of women in historical accounts by giving them a 'seat at the table' and undermining phallogocentric narratives of power and influence. The New York Times review of the 1980 Brooklyn showing described the work as having

an insistence and vulgarity more appropriate, perhaps, to an advertising campaign than to a work of art. Yet what ad campaign, even in these "liberated" times, would dare to vulgarize and exploit the imagery of female sexuality on this scale and with such abysmal taste? (Kramer C1)

When the piece was initially gifted to the University of the District of Columbia in 1990, it was described as "ceramic 3-D pornography" by Californian Republican representative, evangelist Pat Robertson, who accused Chicago of blasphemy (Levin 91), and Republican congressmen threatened to cut funding to the National Endowment for the Arts, which had initially funded the work's creation ("Projects"). Despite its celebration of women's achievements, it is telling that the inclusion and promotion of the images of female genitalia led many of the work's detractors to label it exploitative or pornographic, a rhetorical strategy that implies that while women may be celebrated, it is only if there is a consequent disavowal of the intimacies and intricacies of female sexual biology. In this case, the acknowledgement of women's sex organs indicates that a display of women's bodies and positive sexual embodiment is not only inappropriate, but actually bad for women themselves. The criticism suggests that women are trapped within or inhibited by their bodies, and that only by disavowing their genitals - and, presumably the 'limitations' that come with female embodiment and sexuality<sup>17</sup> - will they be free from objectification or debasement.

The notion that vaginas are deformed, vulgar, ugly and shameful is echoed in the way that the vagina is pathologised in the rapidly expanding field of female genital cosmetic surgery,<sup>18</sup> which first entered the public consciousness in 1998 (Rodrigues 778). Such surgeries are marketed as being for the enhancement of the woman's sexual pleasure so as to allow women to proactively engage with their own (hetero)sexuality. However, despite these apparently self-affirming aspects, much of the emphasis is on

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<sup>17</sup> See Nancy Tuana's 1993 book *The Less Noble Sex* for an extensive discussion on the way that women and femaleness have been framed historically as inferior to man in a multitude of ways. For instance, the: conception of the rational person is in complete opposition to all characteristics historically conceived as female and associated with woman – the body, emotion, and passivity. For centuries prior to Descartes and for centuries after, woman was seen as inescapably bound to the concerns of the body by her role in reproduction – her pregnancies, her lactations, and her menses. (63)

<sup>18</sup> For a recent appraisal, see Louise Prime's November 2013 article for British medical news website OnMedica, "Genital Surgery in NHS Rises Fivefold in a Decade".

making genitalia 'pretty', 'youthful', more 'inviting' or more 'feminine' – that is, that more changes are made for aesthetic rather than functional or medical reasons. The language surrounding such procedures and the hunt for the perfect 'designer vagina', and the other procedures generally offered – such as the aforementioned hymen replacement as well as vulval liposuction, clitoral hood repositioning, labia reductions and augmentations<sup>19</sup> and vaginal tightening – frame the women's body as both imperfect or impeded (Braun 410) and for appraisal and consumption by another, usually posited as a heterosexual male, with 'optimal' aesthetics serving as a means of disciplinary control (Rodrigues 779, 784-5).

While such medical interventions can perhaps be considered an extension of other sexual-aesthetic body modification practices such as pubic waxing and labial dye products such as My New Pink Button<sup>20</sup> (Braun 408), it is important to note that the demand and supply of female genital cosmetic surgery points to the reality that most heterosexual women will have only seen the genitalia of other women in pornographic settings. Australian news and entertainment show *Hungry Beast* suggests that in Australia the ideal 'single crease' vulva that women ask for in clinics has at least in part come about as the indirect result of censorship concerns, rather than legitimate sexual preferences. An anonymous graphic designer who works with pornography explains that the presentation of labia minora in unrestricted softcore pornography, such as Penthouse magazine, is deemed unacceptable and vulgar by classification boards and that his job is to alter the pictures of women's genitalia to fit these prescribed standards of "discrete genital detail" ("Labiaplasty"). The impact of such airbrushing and manipulation is evident in the 'self help'(!) website labiaenhancement.com, which proclaims that

no woman on earth wants to be "*ugly*" down there by having asymmetrical abnormal labia, distorting the shape and appearance of your genitalia... It's every little girl's dream to have perfect vaginal [sic] and pretty vaginal lips. Women who are not blessed with pretty vaginas (genitals) feel inadequate and deformed in their most intimate body part... (emphasis original)

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<sup>19</sup> Anna North, reporting on a screening of the documentary *Exxxit: Life After Porn* (aka *After Porn Ends*, Wagoner US 2010), highlights a scene in which "ex-porn star Houston says she became so used to marketing her celebrity status that when she got a labiaplasty, it was a no-brainer to encase her labia "trimmings" in lucite and sell them" - a move that continues to commodify the female body, even when its constituent parts are no longer attached.

<sup>20</sup> The product's website describes My New Pink Button as "a simple to use Genital Cosmetic Colourant that restores the "Pink" Back to a Woman's Genitals" [sic] ("My New Pink Button").



So, while it would be overly simplistic to suggest that these anxieties are being articulated in such a way purely *because* of pornography, it is certainly significant that these contemporary fictive vaginas (for want of any other broadly 'available' alternative) are posited as both 'ideal' and 'normal' and thus the most attractive to the heterosexual men who, presumably, respond to them sexually in mainstream pornography (Braun 413). Such discursive positioning marks the vagina as a controlled space for (heterosexual male) erotic pleasure, rather than a liminal or abject space of "ambiguity and indefiniteness" (Rodrigues 782).<sup>21</sup>

### THE VAGINA DENTATA IN HORROR

The expression of such cultural fears and disgust towards the vagina and women's sexuality, as well as their presentation, dissemination and rearticulation through artistic and cultural products, embeds these stories within a social reality (Beit-Hallahmi 352). It is unsurprising, then, that the *vagina dentata* is a popular and resonant motif in horror, both in terms of specific characters and its incorporation into decor and mise-en-scène. The toothed, dangerous vagina appears in the bloodied, fanged maw of the vampire (Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine* 107), the mouth of the shark in *Jaws* (Spielberg US 1975) or the burrowing monsters in *Tremors* (Underwood US 1990), the writhing, tentacled chests of the female aliens in *Decoys*, the insatiable alien-plant Audrey II in *Little Shop of Horrors* (Oz USA 1986), the face of the *Predator* (McTiernan US 1987)(who is dubbed "pussyface" in *Predator 2* (Hopkins US 1990)), and the mouths of snake-worshipper Lady Sylvia Marsh and her serpent-deity in the campy *The Lair of the White Worm* (Russell UK 1988). Human mouths, too, evoke the allure of the *vagina dentata* – the blood red lips of the disembodied singing mouth during the opening number of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (Sharman UK-US 1975) juxtapose sexual invitation with impending sexual danger. Barbara Creed argues that, from a

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<sup>21</sup> There are a number of initiatives that seek to counter this sense of shame and ugliness. Australian sexual health website The Labia Library offers information on vaginal health and offers a photo gallery that features a diverse range of female genitalia: "Whatever you call them, it's worth knowing that labia are all different" (Victoria Women's Health). Another, the Beautiful Cervix Project, "provides accessible information about women's fertility and menstrual cycles and showcases photographs documenting changes in the cervix and cervical fluid throughout the cycle" and has "Empowering Self-Exam Kits" that allow women to take photos of their own cervix and, if they feel like it, send them in to be featured on the website ("Beautiful Cervix Project").

psychoanalytic perspective, allusions to the monstrous vagina are present in the genre's fascination with long dark hallways or corridors, with dangerous doors and thresholds (*The Monstrous-Feminine* 109), and with stories that, like Maui and Hine-nui-te-pō, or that of Heracles' trial in the underworld in Greek legend, involve a hero travelling into deep, subterranean spaces of interiority and death, to conquer toothed or monstrous creatures. H. R. Giger's strategically and deliberately sexualised designs for the film *Alien* (Scott UK-US 1979) best evoke abject genital horror: the large, vaginal caverns of the alien spacecraft and the horrific mouth of the parthenogenetic alien creature are coupled with the film's extensive and canny use of visual and thematic signifiers of the monstrous-feminine to create a film that exudes a deep dis-ease surrounding female sexuality.<sup>22</sup>

These expressions of *vagina dentata* are predominantly metaphorical, but there are more (quite literally) explicit examples of monstrous vaginas in a variety of films. Japanese schlock-horror *Sexual Parasite: Killer Pussy* (Nakano JAP 2004), which draws from a history of Japanese porn-and-gore films, features a woman who has a long, snake-like Amazonian parasite living in her vagina, which makes her insatiably aroused and eats the penises of those who come near it as she reaches orgasm. The quirky yet surprisingly non-pornographic sex comedy *Chatterbox!* (DeSimone US 1977) uses the vagina as comic relief: a young beautician's vagina (dubbed 'Virginia') inexplicably starts to talk and sing, often spouting smutty jokes or butting into conversations. They embark upon an ill-fated singing career and eventually find true love in a man whose penis also speaks its mind.<sup>23</sup> Low-budget British horror *Penetration Angst* (Büld UK-GER 2003) treats the *vagina dentata* as a metaphor for sexual dysfunction: Helen, who is coded as both girlishly reticent and sexually available, is repulsed by her body. She has a history of sexual abuse and her hungry vagina demands to be fed, and when men have sex with Helen against her will – which happens with disturbing frequency – the man is devoured, leaving only his clothes behind. Inexplicably, Helen falls in love with a man who has been stalking her, and this resolves her 'penetration angst' and silences her ravenous vagina.

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<sup>22</sup> See chapter six for a detailed analysis of such imagery in the *Alien* films.

<sup>23</sup> See Rees (229-234) for an excellent (and often tongue in cheek) appraisal of this film.

In each of these instances the relationship between the woman and her vagina is synecdochic – that is, the vagina represents the woman herself, so that the woman becomes entirely conflated with her genitalia and its (independent) desires, much as the penis is often framed as an entity with a mind of its own (see Potts 102 – 133). This is not to say that all such representations are negative: in *Bad Biology* (Henenlotter US 2009) Jennifer considers her personal mutation – a dripping, cave-like vagina with “seven clits”, which leaves her in a “permanent state of arousal” – to be an evolutionary leap.<sup>24</sup> She decides that her God-given insatiable appetite for violent, murderous sex must be a sign that she is destined to be “screwed by God” and give birth to his holy child. Jennifer sees her vagina as apocalyptic, a nexus of life and death: “Garden of Eden, Sodom and Gomorrah, Armageddon and all the disciples in my pussy all at once.” This enthusiastic representation reflects director Frank Henenlotter’s overall corpus of exploitation films, which ironically and humorously revel in the excesses of the body.

### ***THE UNHOLY: THE SLUT, THE VIRGIN AND THE PRIEST***

None of this is to suggest that such representations of sexuality and anatomy are straightforward or singular. I argue that these various representations of sexuality can form a complicated and not necessarily coherent *mélange*. In this instance, low brow texts are rich sites of inquiry, for they engage in these issues in a largely uncritical manner and as such can be highly revealing about the nature and content of cultural myth. This is certainly the case in the religious horror *The Unholy* (Vila US 1988), which combines myths about female virginity, male chastity and voracious, demonic sexuality. The film centres on young priest Father Michael, who is sent to take over a church in which the previous priests were viciously sacrificed by an unknown force. Father Michael befriends a troubled young woman, Millie, who is involved with a goth fetish club tellingly named ‘The Threshold’ – the space between sexual immaturity and sexual knowledge. Father Michael is haunted by dreams of a beautiful naked woman dancing outside, images of snakes, and escalating supernatural activity that results in the grisly sacrifice of the church’s dog by an unknown offender. He learns that this is related to a demon called the Unholy who comes to tempt a priest, and when that priest succumbs

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<sup>24</sup> The description of the *vagina dentata* as a favourable evolutionary step is also alluded to in *Teeth*, which is discussed later in this chapter.

the demon viciously butchers him; thus, the sinner is killed in the act of sin and his soul sent to hell. Father Michael, in a confrontation in the church over Easter weekend, manages to keep his lust for the demon's female form, and for Millie, at bay and eventually defeats the demon, but loses his sight in the process.

Within this standard religious horror narrative, *The Unholy* indicates how conflicting and often contradictory representations of sexuality can coexist within narratives that fetishise and (in this case literally) demonise female sexual agency, all while positing that women, in whatever form, are a threat to men. The 'seductress' form of the demon is that of a beautiful naked woman who sports exaggerated signifiers of hypersexuality and hyperfemininity: large breasts, long painted nails, long curly red hair and heavy makeup. She never speaks, only beckons and teases, and is often draped in a flimsy gauzy material that looks better suited to boudoir lingerie, all while filmed in a diffuse soft focus effect that draws from the iconography of late night 1980s erotica. She is associated with the image of serpents, which alludes to Medusa, to Eve's temptation, to transformation and to the devil;<sup>25</sup> goth club owner and stage black magician Luke has a picture of a female and a large python in his bedroom and Father Michael has a nightmare in which his crotch is covered in small snakes. During her attempted temptation of Father Michael we see her image flicking between that of the enticing succubus and that of her true form, a gnarled, scarred, four-legged creature with an enormous fanged mouth and a long, prehensile tongue. We are invited to be both aroused and repulsed in the knowledge that the previous priests of the church were killed for their spiritual and sexual transgressions.

While the demon is presented as both salacious and serpentine, the film offers up a number of conflicting representations of virginity. Father Michael's virginity is presented as both strength and weakness for it is something from which he draws spiritual and physical fortitude but also the means through which he can be corrupted, especially given his obvious erotic feelings for the troubled runaway Millie. She, in turn, is presented in a sexualised but girlish and naive manner that asks the viewer to regard her as both virgin and whore. Millie steals a book of black magic from Luke and is distraught to discover that "the unholy thrives on purity, on priests and virgins" and kills virgins who succumb to temptation, so she presents herself to Father Michael,

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<sup>25</sup> See Drake Stutesman's book *Snake*, especially pages 65-6.

undresses and asks him to make love to her so as to protect her. Ironically, both the film's ingénue and the satanic emissary are shown to be offering exactly the same 'wares' and both promise Father Michael's downfall – for the demon, in taking his soul to hell, and for Millie, by undermining the sanctity of his holy vows. Father Michael, of course, prevails, and comes through the ordeal having given up his sight but having also replenished his waning faith.<sup>26</sup> He also establishes a more 'appropriate' relationship with Millie, in effect replacing the abusive relationships she had with both her father and boyfriend Luke with a more prescribed, paternalistic one. His virginity and piety remains firm, the monstrous vaginal monster is defeated, and Millie is sexually rehabilitated, placed back within a submissive role better fitting a virgin. While the film's internal logic is convoluted, its containment of female sexuality and its celebration of the docile re-educated virgin blatantly typify the way that female sexuality is forced into reductive binary categories, so that female sex is both for the benefit of and dangerous to men.

### **TEETH: REFRAMING VAGINA DENTATA**

So far, in this chapter I have outlined the ways that the chaste virgin and the *vagina dentata* form a dyad, with each standing for a simplistic and reductive representation of women and femininity that defines each by their sexuality or lack thereof. The evocations of the toothed vagina discussed above have been predominantly negative and act to inspire fear, disgust, and loathing. However, the *vagina dentata* can also be reframed as emancipatory: if the virgin body is to be forcibly "annexed", as Rebecca Whisnant (161) suggests, then perhaps the *vagina dentata* can be used as a deterrent. Annie Potts indicates that *vagina dentata* can be a discursive strategy through which women can reclaim their bodies or resist corporeal colonisation by "retaliating against a perceived masculine homosocial sexual prowess which aggressively objectifies and denigrates women" (213). With this in mind, in the remainder of this chapter I address a film that explicitly deploys the *vagina dentata* as a metaphor for sexual self-awareness and self-defence, as well as a means of positive sexual embodiment – the horror satire *Teeth*, which "presents growing up in American

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<sup>26</sup> This happens much in the same way as Father Karras regains his faith in *The Exorcist* (Friedkin US 1973); indeed, *The Unholy* often draws heavily from this film.

suburbia as, in no uncertain terms, a socio-sexual battleground" (Craig and Fradley 90). However, while the film undeniably offers a liberal and progressive attitude towards women's sexuality and self-fulfilment, it nonetheless resolves itself in a troublesome and almost contradictory manner that suggests that perhaps one form of sexual violence and victimhood can only be countered by another.

*Teeth* draws from myths of female sexuality, specifically the chaste virgin and the voracious *vagina dentata*, in a strategic, knowing and often humorous manner. It centres on Dawn O'Keeffe, a wholesome and naive teenager who is enthusiastically involved in her school's chastity club, even though she is undermined and mocked by her schoolmates for her firmly held beliefs. Dawn and her first crush, a 'born-again virgin' named Tobey, succumb to temptation and go to the reservoir, a local make-out point, but when Dawn tries to stop his increasingly impassioned advances, Tobey rapes her - and Dawn's vagina bites his penis off. Dawn is horrified and tries to figure out what is happening with her body - a difficult task, given her ignorance and her own previous disavowal of female sexuality - but the gynaecologist she visits takes advantage of her (and loses his fingers in the process), so she looks to her high school anatomy textbooks and researches *vagina dentata* on the internet. Distraught, alone and frightened, she turns to her classmate, Ryan, who had previously shown interest in her. He plies her with alcohol and anti-anxiety medication, and convinces her to have sex with him - an act that proceeds without his mutilation. However, even though he proclaims himself to be the 'hero' who will remove the *vagina dentata*'s thorns, he is more interested in making her break her virginity pledge than in genuinely helping her, and when Dawn realises she has been the subject of a wager, she exercises her newfound 'agency' and Ryan too becomes one of Dawn's casualties. While Dawn is coming to terms with her sexuality and her body's abilities, her aggressive and misogynistic stepbrother Brad is implicated in the death of Dawn's ailing mother: he fails to hear her shouts for help over the sound of his loud music while he has aggressive sex with his girlfriend. Dawn decides to take advantage of the quasi-incestuous feelings he has had for her since they were infants: she dresses up in a pristine white sundress, seduces him and then castrates him with her vagina, then hitchhikes out of town. In the film's final moments she is picked up by a man who indicates that he wants sexual favours in turn for the ride. Dawn rolls her eyes but then turns to him invitingly, indicating that given her

newfound sexual awareness her toothed vagina is as much a weapon as it is a defence mechanism.

## **SEX, ABSTINENCE AND POSITIVE SEXUALITY**

In her discussion of the teen rom-com *Easy A*, a modern retelling of Nathaniel Hawthorne's book *The Scarlet Letter*, Katherine Farrimond contends that given the millennial preoccupation with virginity in both feminist writing and broader American culture, it is "inevitable" that popular culture offers a response (48). As such, *Teeth* explicitly engages with the most pronounced engagement with virginity and sexual education in the contemporary United States: the abstinence movement. The provisions for the federal funding of abstinence only education in the United States state that "a mutually faithful monogamous relationship in the context of marriage is the *expected standard* of human sexual activity" (Howell and Keefe, emphasis mine) and that completely abstaining from sexual activity before marriage is the only way to avoid pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, and the (alleged) associated health, social and psychological problems. In this sense, such sexual education is about restricting information in the fear that sexual knowledge will increase adolescent sexual activity.

The overwhelming heterosexism of this sexual discourse also draws from very gender-specific and conservative attitudes towards what 'proper' behaviour for young men and women should be. As an example, this sociosexual model puts the onus for sexual avoidance predominantly upon young women, by arguing that they have better sexual self control than their male peers because they are (allegedly) less easily aroused and less visually oriented. Earlier in this chapter I discussed how the virgin and the whore come to typify a dualistic construction of female sexuality, and the framing of teenage sexual desire within discourses of abstinence similarly posits that women are both sexually threatening yet have the responsibility to actively, even militantly, withhold sex. Within such frameworks, young women must take on responsibility for both male and female arousal by 'policing' sexual behaviour (J. Valenti 107), such as by avoiding clothes deemed too tempting and by being trained to forcefully rebuff

unwanted sexual advances.<sup>27</sup> Dawn at first takes this essentialist construction as inherently normal: at the film's outset, Dawn lectures her chastity club on how one's virginity is "the most precious gift of all" not a "handout", she defends the school district board's decision to place large stickers over pictures of female genitalia but not male genitalia in biology textbooks by stating that "girls have a natural modesty", and when she fantasises about Tobey she imagines their wedding night – as erotic a dream as she will allow herself. Initially Dawn and Tobey avoid spending time alone, outside of the relative sexual and moral safety of their social circle, but when they meet for an illicit swim at the reservoir Tobey demonstrates the darker side of this sort of self-denial. When he forces himself onto Dawn, he shouts "I haven't even jerked off since Easter!" and tells her that if she just lies still she will still be pure in the eyes of the Lord, implying that Dawn owes him sex given her obvious interest and his own sexual frustration.

Although targeted funding for abstinence based sexual education in schools in the United States was introduced by conservative lawmakers under the Clinton administration, the 'purity movement' is inextricably linked with the evangelical Christian values that were supported and encouraged under the presidency of George W Bush (2000-2008). Abstinence-only education actively demonises pre-marital sexual activity, "capitalising on the danger and extreme consequences of knowing and / or acting on sexual desire," (Burns and Torre 130-1) by presenting "horror-filled images and portrayals of dire life outcomes [that] have a lasting impact" (Burns and Torre 131) that deny that pre-marital or adolescent sex can be a positive, enriching experience. Eric Keroack, who was from 2006 – 2007 the Deputy Assistant Secretary of the federal Office of Population Affairs, which oversees the United States' government's reproductive health efforts, even proclaimed that "pre-marital sex is really modern germ warfare" and that "sexual activity is a warzone" (qtd. In J. Valenti 54), thus aligning sex with literal as well as moral pollution – much as the anti-VD posters mentioned earlier in this chapter align sex with violence and acts of war. The emphasis on abstinence over sexual education also diverts attention away from proper use of contraceptives, and in some

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<sup>27</sup> See also popular appraisals of these programmes as found on feminist, activist and political blogs: see also "The Christian Right's Slick Campaign to Make Abstinence Seem Trendy" (V. Valenti); "Vaginas Are Like "Little Hoover Vacuums," and Other Things Abstinence Lecturers Get Paid to Tell Teens" (Leibelson); and "Slutty Girls and Stupid Guys: Today's Abstinence-Only Education" (Amplify Your Voice).



cases paints contraception as ineffective and dirty.<sup>28</sup> This model has been widely derided as being misleading and generally ineffective in delaying first penetrative intercourse,<sup>29</sup> although there are indications that abstinence can be an effective means of delaying penetrative sex if couched within identity politics – that is, when “chastity functions essentially as a youth counterculture” (Lancaster 331).

However, while *Teeth* is a strident critique of the misinformation of the purity movement, conservative evangelicism and the move away from comprehensive sexual education, religion is alluded to rather than engaged with directly. Even though Dawn’s abstinence group is clearly Christian, and born-again virgin Tobey refers to being a virgin “in His eyes,” the only point at which religious language or iconography is explicitly referenced (other than a brief exchange about evolution during biology class in which the teacher is obviously frustrated with talk of so-called ‘intelligent design’) is when Dawn gives a presentation to the purity club the day after Tobey has raped her. The meeting takes on an almost hallucinatory quality: the assembled crowd of children and adolescents respond to her in a manner of call and response that explicitly mimics that of evangelical worship, and Dawn’s dialogue with the crowd becomes increasingly strained, desperate and fragmented. The crowd chants to her “she shall be called a woman because she was taken out of man” and Dawn wonders if the thing that is ‘wrong’ with her is “the Adam inside.” “There is something – there is something inside of me – that’s lethal” she says; “the serpent!” replies the de facto congregation, “the serpent beguiled me and I ate.” As Carol J. Clover notes, “The female may not be the exclusive port of entry for the satanic, but she has been since Eve the favoured one” (*Chain Saws* 72), and Dawn struggles to understand herself within a framework that on

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<sup>28</sup> As an example, in 2009 the (now defunct) abstinence resource website *The Facts Project* claimed that: based on typical condom use (and that includes using a condom EVERY time you have sex), a 15 year old teen has a greater than 50% chance of getting pregnant (or getting a girl pregnant) by the time they are 20. These are the same odds as flipping a coin. (“Common Myths About Sex”) This is wholly incorrect and contains significant errors in terms of its computation of statistical probabilities; in contrast, Contraceptive Technology, who publish efficacy rates for all forms of contraception, notes that condoms have a remarkably low pregnancy rate – 0.4% when calculated on a per-condom rate (Hatcher et al., 328-9). In general, they predict that a typical woman who uses a combination of reversible methods of contraception continuously from age 15 to age 45 would experience 1.8 contraceptive failures (Trussell).

<sup>29</sup> See Beh and Diamond for an detailed account of the history of sex education in the United States and the problematic nature of abstinence-only education. They emphasise that “As a result of its singular focus, the curricula not only pose significant problems with respect to ensuring minors’ sexual health, but also ignore the needs of sexual minority youth altogether” (12-13). They assert that the arguments over sex education are less about actually teaching young people about sex, and more about aggressively defining what American values are.

one hand requires chastity of young women, and that on the other hand marks woman as inherently flawed and equates sexuality with temptation and original sin. Dawn's story, then, is the discovery that the 'something' inside of her isn't wicked or foreign at all. Importantly, the film doesn't ask the viewer to mock Dawn for her beliefs – rather, it asks us to have sympathy with her and understand that she's been grossly misled.

*Teeth's* project, then, is to take the rhetorical configuration of sex, as it is presented in an educational, political and religious framework that demonises female sexuality and considers even the basic mechanics of sex too raunchy for the classroom, and make it literally monstrous; however, it emphasises that it is not sex *itself* but abusive sexual practices and sexual ignorance that are dangerous. Firstly, sex is presented as an alluring unknown: when Tobey and Dawn finally meet at the reservoir after weeks of awkward courtship and sexual avoidance, they swim across to a cave. This, the local make-out spot, draws from allusions to the vagina for it is dark, mysterious, wet and inviting; set across the lake, it is a place that they must actively travel to and climb up within, and its verdancy sits in contrast to the parched desert-like surroundings. The cave is a place of secrecy and fertility – as evidenced by the blankets that previous illicit love-makers have left behind – but also a place of danger. Dawn's sexual experience is one that needs to be purged, and when Dawn returns home, after Tobey has been castrated and disappeared into the water, she showers and washes away the muck from the pond, cleansing herself of the rape, then tears the girlish posters and photos from her wall, throwing away the trappings of girlhood and purity.

In their detailed legal discussion of the implications of abstinence-only education in the United States, legal scholar Hazel Glenn Beh and sexologist Milton Diamond state that it "is anything but educational. At best, it deprives students of the knowledge necessary to manage their own sexual health. At worst, it is dangerous to minors and to the public health" (15). This is made apparent in *Teeth* when Dawn realises that she is hopelessly ill-equipped and attempts to find her own answers about sex. She manages to remove the sticker in her biology textbook covering the diagram of the female genitalia and the image is like a revelation; Dawn is obviously both relieved and entranced, although she has no idea what she is looking at, and after revealing the anatomical image, she comically looks down to her crotch, and then back at the diagram (see fig 2.3). During her research she discovers the *vagina dentata* myth and learns that



**Fig. 2.3 A biology lesson:** Dawn removes the sticker covering up the image of female genitalia in her biology textbook, and is surprised to find out what exists between her legs (*Teeth*).

a hero must do battle with the woman – the “toothed creature” - and defeat her power. She also reads that the myth symbolises sexual dread and a journey back to the womb: the vagina is a “dark crucible.” Of course, these myths are as little about female empowerment as her school’s sexual education, and it is only after she experiences

consensual sex (and pleasure) with her classmate Ryan that she comes to be in control of her inner teeth. When she discovers that she's been the subject of a virginity-breaking wager she castrates him and mutters "oh shit. Some hero", dismissively discounting the various myths that she had looked to. As such, her *vagina dentata* isn't the evocation of aggressive and hostile female sexuality: it is a necessary protection against a world full of men who try to deny Dawn her bodily and sexual autonomy.<sup>30</sup> So, it is through this self awareness and practical, embodied knowledge, not through moral isolationism, that Dawn comes to be equipped to deal with and confront the sexual world.

### **TEETH, IRONY AND EMPOWERMENT**

While *Teeth* is a serious engagement with female sexual autonomy, it is presented in a knowing and tongue-in-cheek manner that lightens some of the more horrific aspects of its content while further drawing attention to the absurdity of dominant myths of sex and sexuality through ironic visual juxtapositions. In particular, the film creates then subverts a distinction between light and dark, and purity and danger. Dawn's name recalls associations of light and dawn with virginity, much as her last name, O'Keefe, references American modernist artist Georgia O'Keeffe whose soft, luminescent flower-like paintings evoke images of female genitalia. The film's final sexual conflict is when blonde, radiant Dawn, who has prepared herself for sexual battle by donning a white girlish dress and applying makeup, confronts her dark-haired black-clad stepbrother Brad. While Dawn is initially presented as a wholesome and pure cliché, he is presented as her stereotypical opposite: he is misogynistic, violent and anti-social, a heavily tattooed chain smoker and drug user whose tastes tend towards hardcore pornography and death metal. His most fulfilling relationship is with his rottweiler, "Mother", a canine replacement for his own mother, who he believes had been maliciously displaced by Dawn's mother when he was very young – even though the reason for the dissolution of his parents' relationship is never mentioned. (In a macabre touch, once Brad has been castrated by Dawn, Mother eats the severed penis.) However, Brad's darkness also stems from his dysfunctional relationship with sex: he refuses to have vaginal sex with his girlfriends and instead insists upon penetrating

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<sup>30</sup> It is worth noting that Dawn has only one positive male relationship – that with her stepfather.

them anally because of a half-remembered childhood incident when he tried to insert his finger into Dawn's vagina while they were playing in a paddling pool, but had the top of his finger snapped off instead. It is he who fears the vagina – not because it is inherently dangerous, but because his unwanted probing made it dangerous.

This genital horror and sexual dread is accentuated through the film's self-conscious use of monster movie imagery and tropes. Dawn is horrified by the enormous mandibles of the eponymous stop-motion animated monster of *The Black Scorpion* (Ludwig US 1957), which appears on late night television; later, while asleep and dreaming of a wedding with Tobey she is clearly aroused, but a flash of the scorpion's head intrudes upon her fantasy just as her hand nears her crotch, her self-policing equating her nascent sexuality with monstrosity. Later, the Hammer horror film *The Gorgon* (Fisher UK 1964) plays on a television in the background, and Dawn, when researching *vagina dentata*, is startled by images of Medusa; at the end of the film, once Dawn has taken control of her 'gift', her predatory sexual gaze is accompanied by a snake's rattle. The soundtrack and cinematography is often extremely tongue in cheek, gleefully pastiching the conventions of 1950s creature features: when Tobey tells Dawn that he has previously had sex, the admission is accompanied by heavy, foreboding music and faux-primal drumming as Dawn stares at him with horror; similarly other revelations, such as Dawn's discovery of the myth of the *vagina dentata*, are accompanied by dramatic musical stings. Later, while there are a few explicit shots of severed penises and bloody crotches, horror is usually implied through laboured reaction shots similar to those of 1950s scream queens in B-grade creature features (fig. 2.4). The threat of taint also looms large over Dawn's home: close behind the family's house sits a nuclear power plant whose cooling towers spew clouds of smoky steam above the trees of the comically idyllic small town (fig. 2.5). An early scene in Dawn's biology class hints that her toothed vagina may be a beneficial mutation caused by the proximity of the power station; however, the image of it looming over her house indicates the ever-present threat to purity and family by pollution, both literal and spiritual.



**Fig. 2.4 Scream queen:** In a nod to B movie conventions, Dawn covers her mouth in exaggerated horror and highly dramatic music plays as she reads about the origins of the *vagina dentata* myth (*Teeth*).

*Teeth* is clearly a film made with a distinct feminist sensibility, and it positions itself as a satirical fable about the dangers of sexual ignorance, and the attainment of female self-sufficiency and autonomy. Writer-director Mitchell Lichtenstein acknowledges that he is freely referencing attitudes to women and the perceived threat of female sexuality, but argues that he engages with these issues and images critically, noting that

if you go back to the original metaphor of a toothed vagina, then you're automatically, I think, showing that it says only something about men, and their attitude toward women. It doesn't have anything to do with the qualities of women. (Billington)

He also indicates that the monsters of the film are more insidious and quotidian than Dawn and her 'unique anatomy', positioning Dawn away from past representations of monstrous women, such as telekinetic, destructive high school student Carrie in the eponymous 1976 film:

I certainly recognize that *Carrie* is a model [for the story and character], because she learns about her power [upon] reaching puberty and it's connected to her sexuality and then it's a destructive power, but aimed toward people who, within the context of the movie, deserve it. But one big difference is that Carrie is destroyed in the end and Dawn will never be destroyed because she is not a



monster. Carrie was a sympathetic monster but in this movie it's really not Dawn who is the monster. (Billington)

Instead, Lichtenstein frames Dawn's journey within the film as something that gives her immense strength and privilege: "it's really about the birth of a superhero" ("Interview



**Fig. 2.5: The threat of pollution:** The film's opening shot pans across to a pair of nuclear cooling stacks before tilting down to reveal Dawn's idyllic suburban (nuclear) family home, on the day of the film's inciting childhood incident, when young Brad has his finger snipped by infant Dawn's vagina (*Teeth*).

with Mitchell Lichtenstein"). However, the film's resolution, whereby Dawn decides to use her *vagina dentata* punitively as a sexual vigilante, not just against Brad but against the lecherous old man who she hitchhikes with and, presumably, others who fall foul of her, will for some cast doubt over the film's overall success as an empowerment narrative.

### **TEETH AND THE SEXUAL VIGILANTE**

As with the climax of *The Cabin in the Woods*, this ambivalent resolution is indicative of the way that such knowing, postmodern texts engage with issues surrounding women's bodies, in that they both critique patriarchal, heterosexist and often overtly misogynistic material while simultaneously reinforcing the status quo. Katherine Farrimond argues that (post)feminist texts – that is, texts she sees as both taking into account and repudiating selected forms of feminism (44) – “demonstrate a selective approach to feminist sensibilities” such that they exhibit “neither a clearly defined progressive response nor a straightforwardly conservative reaction to ideas around sexuality and empowerment” (44). *Teeth's* resolution is problematic because it suggests that the misogynistic world that Dawn lives in won't change, and as such she will need to continue to deal with matters in a manner that conforms to hostile representations of female sexuality; where Jennifer in *Jennifer's Body* becomes a succubus, seducing men to devour them, Dawn is not so far divorced from the American infantrymen's legends of Viet Cong women with grenades in their vaginas invoked in the accounts collected by folklorists Monte Gulzow and Carol Mitchell.

On one hand, *Teeth* critiques conservative identity politics through its rebuttal and handling of conservative evangelical Christian sexual politics. However, it nonetheless ironically reinforces other forms of conservative identity politics through its invocation of the lone vigilante – a figure who “actualizes signature themes of U.S. conservatism: strong individualism, distrust of the state, [a] focus on the rights of crime victims, advocacy of the death penalty, and the right to bear arms” (Stringer 270-1) – or, in this case, bear teeth. This is further actualised by the lack of support that Dawn receives, for while her parents are supportive, her only female ally – her terminally ill mother – dies, in part because of her stepbrother's indifference towards her mother's



health. *Teeth* is not alone in its presentation of such a figure; indeed, in a discussion of recent teen horrors, “Hell is a Teenage Girl?”, Martin Fradley asserts that teen horror films as a matter of course deal with “young women’s everyday gendered discontent” (209) recycle and rearticulate a key trope in postfeminist cinema: “women who embrace violence as a refusal of victimhood” (214). This victimhood-to-violence narrative is a staple of the rape-revenge subgenre, in which “Rape and sexual objectification serve... as a catalyst for an expressionistic violence which offers a way of talking about the violent (re-)emergence of a feminist political consciousness” (217). Such narratives suggest that specific, targeted revenge is the best (or, at least, most satisfying) remedy for sexual abuse and violence. The female vigilante then recalls the figure of the *femme castratrice* – a rather literal figure in the instance of *Teeth* that is perhaps more metaphorically stated in other films, such as in Needy’s vengeful slaying of the indie rock band who sacrificed Jennifer, which is presented during the closing credits of *Jennifer’s Body* (213-4).

But as satisfying as this vengeance may be in any given film, it elides what has historically been an important part of feminist struggle: collectivity and community. This sort of revenge is, by its very nature, deeply individualistic, both in terms of the way that it is enacted and the highly personal wrongs it addresses, but Rebecca Stringer asks “whether the figure of the vigilante is adequate as a symbol of feminist efforts to challenge and resist male violence” (280). Stringer analyses two recent female vigilante films, *The Brave One* (Jordan US-AUS 2007) and *Hard Candy* (Slade US 2005), and her comments on the political implications of the genre are worth recounting at length:

[... the female protagonists] disrupt the sexist script of feminine victimhood, articulating instead female agency and the capacity to fight back against male violence. Yet this gender trouble comes at a price: in these characters is also figured a grievous misrepresentation of feminism as somehow finding its rightful conclusion in violent vigilantism. Lone vigilantism is the very opposite of the actual strategies advocated in feminist anti-violence efforts, which have primarily assumed the form of collective political struggle and non-violent direct action... (280)

While I do not argue at all that the individualism itself that is expressed in *Teeth* is inherently wrong or anti-feminist – and nor do I agree with Stringer that the only way to address violence is through idealised collectivism – it is important to note that the film’s vigilante ending most certainly reflects a broader attitude towards women, victimhood and violence in millennial American film-making. So, while *Teeth* positions

itself as a rhetorical interrogation of misogynistic and reductionist ways of constructing female sexuality, it does so by ultimately rearticulating (or, at least, co-opting) another negative female construct, and by deploying her in a manner that sits in opposition to constructive and hard-won feminist battles about violence, both at the level of community and of the individual. Thus, *Teeth* offers a conflicted and troublesome moral – that perhaps only by embodying and deploying masculine fears of voracious female carnality can women best protect themselves. Clearly, this does nothing to move away from a situation wherein women are defined by their sexuality and their relationship towards men's heterosexuality, specifically insofar as women's sexuality relates to such heterosexual narratives of consumption, containment and desire.

## ENFORCING HETEROSEXUALITY

In this chapter I have outlined the way that in horror film the chaste virgin and the horrific, carnal *vagina dentata* come to exemplify the restrictive cultural construction of woman as a dual creature – the Madonna and the whore, both of which define woman by her sexual, erotic and reproductive status with regards to (heterosexual) men. As a coda – what, then, of the lesbian in horror film? Harry M. Benshoff's 1997 book *Monsters in the Closet: Homosexuality in the Horror Film* gives an in depth account of the relationship between the horror genre, its monsters and queerness, in particular the way that the genre both equates (male) homosexual desire as monstrous, for "American culture has generally constructed its ideas about and fears of homosexuality within a framework of male homosexuality" (7). This indicates a wider issue: in the horror film and in particular the slasher, killers and monsters are often associated with some sort of impaired or transgressive masculinity (also see Clover, *Chain Saws* 26-29), but there is little overt lesbian presence in the horror film. The erotic thriller *Basic Instinct* (Verhoeven US-FR 1992) is widely touted as featuring a lesbian killer, but this ignores the fact that Catherine, the film's *femme fatale*, is bisexual and the majority of her sex scenes are with a man. Bisexuality is also present in *Jennifer's Body*, the dark horror comedy *May* (McKee US 2002) and the erotic vampire film *The Hunger* (Scott UK 1983). Indeed, vampire films have opened up more space for lesbian desire than other areas of the horror genre, such as in camp 1970s films such as

those in Hammer Studios' *Karnstein Trilogy* (*The Vampire Lovers* (Baker UK-US 1970), *Lust for a Vampire* (Sangster UK 1971) and *Twins of Evil* (Hough UK 1972)). There are a small handful of by-lesbians-for-lesbians films; one such instance is the low budget slasher *Make A Wish* (Ferranti US 2002), in which a woman brings together all her ex-girlfriends for a camping trip on her birthday who are butchered one by one in what is ultimately revealed to be an elaborate revenge fantasy. Allusions, too are present: in the torture-centric *Hostel: Part II* (Roth US 2007) it is often implied but never explicitly stated that Final Girl Beth is gay (see Wester 397-8). However, in most of these instances I suggest that lesbian erotic relationships are largely performative and are present primarily to satisfy a voyeuristic heterosexual male gaze, rather than to adequately represent or embody lesbian identity or desire.<sup>31</sup>

A rare and troublesome example of lesbian desire in the horror film is in the French slasher film *Haute Tension* (*High Tension*) (Aja FR 2003). The protagonist, Marie, travels to the country with her friend Alex to stay with Alex's family. However, in the night a hulking, filthy and brooding man in a boiler suit, identified in the credits only as *le tueur* (the killer), arrives at the country house and butchers Alex's family before capturing Alex and taking her away in his truck. Marie pursues them to try to rescue Alex and confront the villain – only it is revealed that Marie *is* the killer, and that her unrequited desire for her heterosexual friend has triggered a psychotic break.<sup>32</sup> This is indicated visually in a number of ways: shots in which Marie moves in and out of shadow, the strategic use of mirrors and security footage and the symbolic cracking along the face of a child's doll, as well as a colour palette that asks us to question not only what is happening, but from whose perspective (A. Cameron 93).

While Barry Keith Grant ("When the Woman Looks") suggests that a reading of lesbian-as-monster is facile, it is nonetheless both cynical and significant to point out that the revelation of Marie's murderous psychopathy is explicitly co-dependent on the revelation of her (covert) lesbian sexuality. Further, *le tueur* is played by actor Phillippe Nahon who was previously known for playing violent and unpleasant characters in

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<sup>31</sup> See also my discussion of *The Unborn* (Flencer US 1991) in chapter four; in the film a lesbian couple run a Lamaze class that is as much anti-men as it is pro-woman, and they serve to embody and reinforce negative clichés about second wave feminism and feminists.

<sup>32</sup> The film's climax recalls *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*; where that film's antagonist, Leatherface, chases after Sally with a phallic chainsaw, Marie pursues Alex while brandishing a circular saw, a canny choice that perhaps alludes to the *vagina dentata* and the circularity of her monstrous female desire.

French thrillers, particularly as a nameless butcher in three films by Argentine provocateur Gaspar Noé; this casting choice intertextually codes Marie's lesbian desire as inherently masculine, dirty and violent. This is exemplified in a presumably fictitious and metaphorical scene early in the film where we see *le tueur* fellating himself with a woman's decapitated head before throwing it out the window of his truck. While Marie initially fulfils the criteria for the virginal Final Girl<sup>33</sup> – she is watchful, intelligent, androgynous and sexually aloof, and she actively stalks and confronts the killer – these generic features are used to mask her psychopathic desire and lay the foundations for the film's twist ending.<sup>34</sup>

These examples point clearly to what Adrienne Rich termed “compulsory heterosexuality”: the bias through which lesbian experience is marked as deviant, abhorrent or simply invisible (632), and through which heterosexuality is deemed innate, natural, a social and economic imperative (634), and actively enforced through social and political means (640). Rich asserts that “the institution of heterosexuality itself [is] a beachhead of male dominance” (633) and, to move beyond her discussion of homosexuality, I argue that this is exemplified in the way that female sexuality in the horror film is forcibly categorised as either horrific and all-engulfing – the *vagina dentata* – or contained and controlled in the form of the chaste, sacrificial virgin or the virgin hero. So, too, does the male virgin enforce these constructions, for the coding of male virginity as effeminate actively devalues femininity, such that chastity can only be performed as masculine if it is associated with a militant and ascetic disavowal of desire (and women) altogether. All this is to demonstrate that horror films actively perform and naturalise normative heterosexuality by framing the woman's body and sexuality as either *for* or *against* man or a masculine other – a highly problematic and restrictive proposition that will continue to become apparent in the chapters on pregnancy, reproductive technology and motherhood that follow.

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<sup>33</sup> See chapter five of David Greven's *Representations of Femininity in American Genre Cinema* for an in depth discussion of queerness and the Final Girl. With regards to queer spectatorship, he asks “are we the Final Girl, or the monster she destroys?” (8)

<sup>34</sup> The extensive online database of pop culture tropes and idioms [tvtropes.org](http://tvtropes.org) describes the figure of the “psycho lesbian” in this tongue-in-cheek manner: “This trope can sometimes carry uncomfortable subtext: go straight or go crazy. Or *at least* have the decency of being bisexual so you can be of proper use for men” (“Psycho Lesbian”, emphasis original).

## CHAPTER THREE: THE LADY VANISHES

### PREGNANCY, ABORTION AND SUBJECTIVITY

*You may not look pregnant yet, but chances are you're feeling it. That's because a flood of pregnancy hormones is prepping your body to play baby hostess for the next nine months.*

*"First Trimester of Pregnancy", What To Expect When You're Expecting*

*The pregnant subject is not simply a splitting in which the two halves lie open and still, but a dialectic.*

Iris Marion Young, "Pregnant Embodiment: Subjectivity and Alienation"  
(167)

This chapter is the first of two that explores theories of subjectivity. In this chapter I interrogate pregnancy as an 'embodied' state, first considering philosophical models of pregnant subjectivity, before outlining how pregnancy, foetal imagery and abortion are represented in the horror film, and to what end. In the following chapter, I look beyond embodiment and address reproductive technology and so called "mad" science narratives, in particular, how biological reproduction is framed within hegemonic constructions of gender and power, and the ways that reproduction may occur outside of the woman's body or without her altogether. In both chapters the question of subjectivity is at the fore. The films that I discuss in this chapter vividly portray a struggle between self and other, and the incompatibility of an ontological framework that is predicated on autonomous individuality with the subjective and lived state of pregnancy. This is complicated by the simple narrative fact that each film must also struggle with the creation of a believable, knowable protagonist, so this linking of the woman with the foetus or unborn child places the women in these films in a peculiar place. As characters, they exhibit agency and subjectivity, but through the narrative or

through the *mise-en-scène*, the woman may come to be eliminated. This may be through the elision of the woman's image or experience, or it may simply be through the way that the story is framed.

By way of introduction, consider *Rosemary's Baby* (Polanski US 1968), in which Rosemary occupies a tenuous subject position. Even before she is impregnated as a part of a Satanic ritual, she is treated as a potential vessel for a child – one that her husband happily barter away in exchange for fame and glory. Throughout the pregnancy, the care Rosemary receives isn't really for her. When she complains about her waning health, she is silenced by her husband and the Castavets, who encourage her to drink foul herbal drinks for the baby's health. The doctor chosen for her by the Castavets is only interested in Rosemary insofar as she provides a corporeal home for the unborn child. As Rosemary loses control of her body and her home, the film's formal elements serve to confine Rosemary within cinematic space that makes *her* childlike. Once the child is born and taken away and the disruption to Rosemary's body has abated she retains value, but only for what she can provide her child: mother's milk, and a maternal influence. The horror of *Rosemary's Baby*, beyond the film's lurid Satanic storyline, is that Rosemary is almost totally eradicated by the other within: she is not a self-contained autonomous subject, but becomes an object, an incubator, and a means to an end. This film, which has so clearly influenced the representation of horrific pregnancy in film since its release in 1968, also highlights a problematic area of philosophical enquiry: how to consider subjectivity in light of pregnancy, a state in which one becomes more-than-one, when our dominant notions of the subject are founded on the idea of an autonomous indivisible individual. After all, although Rosemary is the protagonist, Polanski's film is titled *Rosemary's Baby*.

In this chapter I use terms such as 'foetus', 'unborn child', 'embryo', 'pregnant woman' and 'mother' in very specific ways. This is not to straddle a political fence or to give a sense of political ambiguity, but to reflect the perceived attitudes of the film towards both the pregnancy itself and the ontological positioning of the woman throughout the pregnancy in question, be they explicitly or implicitly stated. Politically, and particularly with regards to debates surrounding abortion, the term 'foetus' is favoured by those speaking from a so-called 'pro-choice' perspective – that is, one that favours access to abortion and emphasises a woman's right to bodily self-determination

- as it clarifies the position that while the pregnant woman is a subject and a citizen with rights, her foetus is not. This choice of terminology is a political act of dehumanisation that refutes the idea that an embryo or foetus is a human being and that, therefore, abortion is not necessarily the death of a human being. The term 'unborn child' is favoured by those arguing from a so-called 'pro-life' position – that is, one that opposes abortion entirely – as it emphasises a sense of foetal subjectivity. It positions the unborn as inherently human and therefore subject to the same ethical considerations as a born human being, although in doing so it often elides or challenges whatever rights the pregnant woman may have. The terms 'pro-life' and 'pro-choice' are themselves acts of political framing or agenda-setting,<sup>1</sup> even though the terms 'pro-abortion rights' and 'anti-abortion rights' are a more accurate representation of the political positioning of the groups. However, they are the terms widely adopted for themselves by those engaged in debates surrounding termination, and it is not helpful to challenge them within the context of this chapter's argument.<sup>2</sup>

## CONSTRUCTING AND CHALLENGING THE PREGNANT SUBJECT

The representation of pregnancy in popular culture, especially film, is a broad area of study, but here I focus specifically on representations of 'gynaehorror', in particular those that appear in horror and horrific science fiction. Barbara Creed analyses the monstrous womb – although not pregnancy *per se* - through the lens of psychoanalysis and abjection in her book *The Monstrous-Feminine* through a discussion of *The Brood*, and she also considers reproduction in her analysis of the figure of the 'archaic mother' in *Alien*. A number of articles and book chapters deal specifically with *Rosemary's Baby*; for instance, Rhona J. Berenstein ("Mommie Dearest: Aliens, Rosemary's Baby and Mothering") argues that the representation of pregnancy and monstrosity in *Rosemary's Baby* is indicative of wider cultural and patriarchal fears over women's ability to reproduce. In "'Rosemary's Baby', Gothic Pregnancy, and Fetal Subjects", Karyn Valerius analyses the film with regards to contemporaneous abortion

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<sup>1</sup> See Chamberlain and Hardisty for a left-leaning discussion on the importance of the political "framing" of abortion.

<sup>2</sup> See Alicia C. Shepard's article "In the Abortion Debate, Words Matter" for a discussion of the position of publicly funded US radio station NPR on their choice of language, both on-air and off-, when reporting on or discussing abortion, as compared to the positions of other media entities and style guides.

politics and the cultural idealisation of maternity. Lucy Fischer's analysis in "Birth Traumas: Parturition and Horror in "Rosemary's Baby"" treats the film as a gothic allegory for the "societal and personal turmoil" of pregnancy, in particular women's private experiences of pregnancy (4); the article is reprinted in her 1996 book *Cinematernity: Film, Motherhood and Genre*, which positions *Rosemary's Baby* as emblematic of the horror genre.

Two recent works also engage explicitly with reproduction and horror. Kelly Oliver's 2012 book *Knock Me Up, Knock Me Down: Images of Pregnancy in Hollywood Films* devotes a chapter to horror film, with an emphasis on abjection and the uncanny in *Rosemary's Baby* and science fiction thriller *The Astronaut's Wife*, as well as a chapter to reproductive technology, which in part references horror and science fiction film. However, despite an earlier chapter that offers a potted history of the interplay between academic feminism and Hollywood feminism, the book is more of a survey of representation in film than a serious theoretical engagement with the implications of these images. More recently, Sarah Arnold offers a psychoanalytic reading of pregnancy in the horror film in chapter five of her 2013 book *Maternal Horror Film: Melodrama and Motherhood*, in particular noting that pregnancy is often present in religious or apocalyptic narratives – an area that I will address later in this chapter. While her strongly psychoanalytic focus is not of great interest to my argument here, she helpfully points out that "discourses of pregnancy are displaced by discourses of motherhood" (5) so that pregnancy is often considered *as* motherhood from the point of conception (156-7), a conflation that problematises many of the available analyses of pregnancy in horror. It is here that I wish to differentiate myself from Arnold's argument; where she considers the representation of the pregnant woman-as-mother and analyses how psychoanalytic discourses of idealised motherhood operate during pregnancy, I look specifically to expressions of subjectivity and embodiment: pregnancy as a lived, corporeal state in and of itself.

What is apparent from this brief summation is that *Rosemary's Baby* is a touchstone text – perhaps the gynaehorror *par excellence* – and it dominates discussions of pregnancy in horror. However, given my appraisal of the film with regards to spatiality and houses in my opening chapter, and in the interests of diversity – and for fear of walking over well-trod ground – I do not address Rosemary's pregnancy in great



detail in this chapter, other than to assert here that when horror films *do* engage with pregnancy, they almost invariably do so in that film's shadow. Instead, I look beyond *Rosemary's Baby* to consider what horror films can contribute to a discussion of embodied subjectivity, and vice versa. Linda Williams, in "Gender, Genre and Excess", categorises the horror film (along with the melodrama and the pornographic film) as a 'body genre': a film that is categorised by the spectacle of corporeal excess through "the gross display of the human body" (3). This body is often a "sexually saturated" female body (6) that is "caught in the grip of intense sensation or emotion" (4), such that its display in turn effects a pronounced physiological response in the viewer such as arousal, tears, or horror. Given this designation the logical question, to me, is what such a body genre can in turn tell us about our understanding of the body, especially given that pregnant bodies can most certainly be considered both sensational and sexually saturated, and that the representation of pregnancy itself was historically "hidden from view because it was considered ugly, even shameful" (Oliver 1). As such, I consider issues of pregnancy – and the attendant issues of reproductive technologies, abortion and foetal personhood – with regards to bodies and subjectivity in the horror film. In particular, I explore how these films both express and represent a struggle to consider pregnant subjectivity beyond the tension between the embodied female-self and the foetal-other that is so frequently cited in the discussions of *Rosemary's Baby* above.

## THEORIES OF PREGNANT SUBJECTIVITY

It is important to consider the way that pregnant subjectivity is considered in philosophy, for this philosophical engagement is a key way of unpacking how the pregnant subject is represented, both visually and in terms of narrative, in the horror film. In the introduction to his book *Subjectivity: Theories of Self from Freud to Haraway*, philosopher Nick Mansfield indicates that 'the subject' can be thought of as a construct that posits the self as "not a separate and isolated entity, but one that operates at the intersection of general truths and shared principles" (3), although what exactly those 'truths' are is highly problematic. Subjectivity is of integral importance to the feminist project (see Gavey 92-4), but as Jane Kilby and Celia Lury indicate, the notion of subjectivity is itself historically and culturally fraught: a complicated and highly

contested political terrain. They note that ethnocentric and feminist interrogations of the autonomous subject have shown how western culture and discourse:

sets limits as to whose thought is recognised, who can act in the world, and whose rights are guaranteed as a form of self-possession. Women, as well as, for example, gays and lesbians and the working classes, are categorically excluded from such a definition of the subject; simply put, they do not matter.  
 ("Introduction" 253)

Mansfield identifies four broad types of subjectivity, or ways of separating ourselves into distinct selves. The first is the "subject of grammar" – the seemingly discrete "I", who at once seems to originate action but who is inherently tangled up within "a huge and volatile, even infinite, transhistorical network of meaning-making" (3). The second is the politico-legal subject – an individual who is an actor within fixed "codes and powers" (4) such as the law and the State. This is a reciprocal obligation, wherein we agree to what Jean-Jacques Rousseau "first called a 'social contract' which asks certain responsibilities of us, and guarantees us certain freedoms in return" (4). The third subject is the free and autonomous philosophical subject of the Enlightenment. This reasoning subject is in part "defined by the rational faculties it can use to order the world" (15), such as the ability to perceive and be aware of the world (18), and - drawing from Immanuel Kant - is the centre of "truth, morality and meaning" (4). Finally, Mansfield's fourth subject is the subject as human person: the phenomenological 'self' or personality who experiences (and exists *within*) the world.

Tellingly, the first three of these definitions of subjectivity are challenged, or at least made problematic, by pregnancy. Western philosophical models of the self are inherently androcentric in that they treat a body that does not have the potential to become pregnant as the neutral body-self – a point that I will return to shortly. The term 'individual' implies one that may not be divided, but the pregnant body starts as one, becomes more-than-one, then returns to one<sup>3</sup>, albeit one that is irrevocably changed – a process that sits at odds to the indivisible, autonomous subject of the Enlightenment. This area has only recently been addressed within feminist philosophy, and three key engagements with pregnant subjectivity have been published in the last 30 years; Iris Marion Young's "Pregnant Embodiment: Subjectivity and Alienation", written in 1984, is

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<sup>3</sup> Old English terms for "pregnant" reflect this elasticity: *bearn-eaca*, literally "child-adding" or "child-increasing;" and *geacnod*, "increased" ("Pregnant").

the earliest. The article identifies firstly the way that the pregnant subject comes to be split and decentred both in terms of lived experience, and secondly the way that the medical profession frames pregnancy as a condition or a disorder that requires intervention, rather than a normal way of being in which the woman is an authority on her own body. Young positions her work as both a criticism and an extension of phenomenological accounts of subjectivity. She argues that while phenomenologists such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Erwin Straus have successfully advocated for the body as a site of knowledge, perception and experience, rather than the thinking self of Descartes' *cogito*, they nonetheless rely on dualistic language: there is an inherent assumption that the *subject* (I) is a unified self, as distinct from an *object* (not-I), and that this unified self is a condition of experience (162). There is a tacit assumption in such conceptualisations that the (young, productive, healthy) male body is the neutral, default way of experiencing the world (see M. Connolly 180), and Young rightly asserts that "the specific experience of women has been absent from most of our culture's discourse about human experience and history" (161). As philosopher Imogen Tyler puts it, "It is in the light of my pregnant embodiment that I was able to discern the absence of any maternal morphology within the real and imaginary spaces of philosophy" ("Reframing Pregnant Embodiment", 290-1).

To challenge this historic essentialism Young considers the embodied experience of her own pregnancy, highlighting first the changing shape and sensation of her body, and then how her first awareness of foetal movement – the 'quickenings'<sup>4</sup> – produces a "sense of the splitting subject" (163). For Young, pregnancy is a "unique temporality", in which the subject can "experience herself as split between past and future" (160). The intimate, interior relationship between pregnant woman and foetus is "not unlike that which I have to my dreams and thoughts" (163), but is undermined by the medicalisation of pregnancy, which privileges instrumentation, medical imaging and physical intervention over the knowledge imparted by a woman's own senses. This interventionism takes as natural the idea that there must be mediation between the woman (as self and subject) and her 'disobedient' body; as Jane M. Ussher writes, "Mythology and religious rituals have historically provided an illusion of control over

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<sup>4</sup> Historically, the quickening was generally considered to be the point at which life begins and the "child was now present" (Addelson 29), a definition that is still referred to today in some quarters; see Applewhite 90-2.

the unsettling, contradictory, fecund body ... But in the West, science has now taken over, medicalising pregnancy and positioning the unruly body as object of expert containment and control" (*Managing the Monstrous Feminine* 87). However, Young's exploration of pregnant embodiment both challenges yet inadvertently demonstrates the limitations of how we consider female embodied experience. Despite her call for an embodied understanding of pregnant subjectivity, Young nonetheless recycles the dualist language that she critiques: she considers the dissonance between what she terms her "aesthetic interest" in and awareness of her pregnant body *vis-à-vis* her philosophical and personal "aims and projects" (165), a disjunction that distances her (as a philosopher) from her embodied experience (as a woman). This split recycles the Cartesian dualism that she wishes to confront by associating the body with femininity, corporeality and aesthetic, and the mind and intellect with distanced, masculine rationality.

The problems with the formulation of split subjectivity are considered in great depth by philosopher Christine Battersby, whose 1998 book *The Phenomenal Woman: Feminist Metaphysics and Patterns of Identity* seeks to challenge the view that human beings are entirely autonomous individuals. Battersby takes umbrage with the fact that "Philosophers have notably failed to address the ontological significance of the fact that selves are born" (3) – "as if birth was just 'natural', something that simply happened before man 'is'" (18) – even though all 'individuals' have at some stage been in a state of foetal or childhood dependency. Battersby argues that to adequately account for sexual difference, five characteristics of the female subject-position must be addressed. She states that we must: recognise "the *conceptual* link between the paradigm 'woman' and the body that births" (7, emphasis original) as an abstract component of embodiment; address the "ontological dependence of the foetus on the mother" (8); acknowledge that philosophically and practically "for the (normalized) 'female' there is no sharp division between 'self' and 'other'" (8); accept that "in our culture, at least, female [cf. feminine] identities are fleshy identities" (9); and consider that the "'experience' of the female human in our culture has direct links with the anomalous, the monstrous, the inconsistent and the paradoxical" (11), in such a way that allows for a re-contextualisation, or an opening up, of embodied identity.

Instead of treating women as a deviation from the (presumably male, individuated) norm, Battersby requires that, in our acknowledgement that we are all born subjects, we position the female body as the starting point for a new fleshy metaphysics, which would mean that the act of birth is no longer framed (philosophically) as an abnormal state (2) underpinned by the assumption that “the sense of discontinuity and alienation experienced by the male in reproduction is attributed to both genders” (Blaetz 17). Rather, Battersby’s project considers “what happens if we treat the potential for pregnancy ... as central to the notion of personhood and self” (Battersby 17) so as to conceptualise identity in a way that is founded on a “metaphysics of fluidity and mobile relationships” (7) – an identity that privileges becoming over static being,<sup>5</sup> and that acknowledges that all born subjects have, at one stage, been more-than-one. Battersby suggests, somewhat contentiously, that if there is a ‘sameness’ to women, it originates from a shared metaphysical position: that “Whether or not a woman is lesbian, infertile, post-menopausal or childless,<sup>6</sup> in modern western cultures she will be assigned a subject position that has *perceived* potentialities for birth” (16, my emphasis), and that this “female predicament” (22) must no longer go unconsidered, given its implication for both classical and postmodern understandings of subjectivity and personhood. Thus, in Battersby’s framework, the female body and the resultant malleability of embodied experience and subject position become the norm.

The most recent philosophical engagement with pregnant subjectivity comes from Imogen Tyler, whose work was published two years after Battersby’s. Like Young, Tyler’s own work on pregnant embodiment is couched in autobiographical detail and a discussion of the phenomenology of pregnancy. In “Reframing Pregnant Embodiment”, Tyler considers how few engagements with pregnant subjectivity there are before asking, “Can the philosophical body, philosophical bodies, contain, account for, or even imagine, a body, a subject, that reproduces others, not metaphorically, but literally?” (289) To address this she considers her own experience as a heavily pregnant subject, attending an academic seminar, “overcome with tired rage at [the] indifference” (290)

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<sup>5</sup> The relationship between being and becoming is considered in great depth in chapter five’s discussion of Deleuze, Guattari and schizoanalysis.

<sup>6</sup> Through the term ‘childless’ Battersby nonetheless recycles the distinctions that she is trying to critique. ‘Childfree’ is a more modern term, which reframes the decision to not have children as a proactive and positive one, rather than one of loss or lost opportunities. See also the discussion of essential motherhood in chapter five, which constructs motherhood as the pinnacle of female experience and a biological and cultural imperative.

of many of her philosopher colleagues towards the importance of sexual difference, stating her desire to go to the front of the room and present “my body, my massive pregnant body” (290) *itself* as a question to the visiting philosopher. Estranged and frustrated by the disjunction between her academic practice, her lived experience and her transitional pregnant subjectivity, she concludes “I am, philosophically, a freak” (290). This is delivered with a strong sense of irony for, as she later points out, “pregnancy is one of the most socially conventional and controlled forms of embodiment which women can, and the majority of women still do, experience” (291). Thus, pregnancy exposes an enormous problem at the heart of philosophical models of self and subjectivity (293), for through its shifting, transitional nature and its disruption of fixed frames of reference, “pregnant embodiment highlights the difficulty of making any ontological claims with certainty” (292).

Tyler considers the work of Young and Battersby, in conjunction with Simone de Beauvoir’s discussion of pregnancy and motherhood in 1949’s *The Second Sex* (which was first translated into English in 1953), and concludes that the current philosophical engagement with pregnant subjectivity and embodiment is inadequate. Tyler identifies “contradictory loyalties which constrict the work of feminist philosophy”, such as a reliance on a “philosophical egalitarianism” that poses the “object-woman, specifically the potentially pregnant woman, as a subjectivity which can serve as a model for *both* sexes” (298, my emphasis), for this cannot, to Tyler’s mind, seriously challenge or adapt the deeply embedded historic metaphysical structures that have for so long denigrated or ignored female embodied experience. She argues that this is, in large part, because these philosophers “face the same grammatical problems faced by any theorist who wishes to explore female subjectivity in the context of non-singular models of self” (297). This includes the problematic designation of woman as construct – as evidenced by Battersby’s frequent use of quotation marks around the terms woman and female – and the implied position of the philosopher as one who may “comment outside and above as the neutral (*non-gendered*) observer” (297, my emphasis), for this allegedly neutral position nonetheless positions woman as ‘other’. As such, Tyler advocates for philosophical engagement with pregnancy to come “from the embodied position of the subject matter”, hence her inclusion of autobiographical detail and experience in the content of the article.

In this sense Tyler's project draws from Luce Irigaray's work in *Speculum of the Other Woman* and *This Sex Which Is Not One*, both of which were published in English in 1985. These works outline how woman is denied subjectivity by having her status (and use value) constructed as both Other to and in relation to man, rather than existing as her own whole subject, in large part because of the androcentrism within masculinist modes of language. Irigaray's emphasis upon the problem of maternal disavowal, which I discuss in chapter one of this thesis, is likewise echoed in Battersby's insistence that we consider people as born subjects – people who have necessarily been a part of another body. Combined, what Young, Battersby and Tyler demonstrate is that current dominant models of subjectivity wholly fail to account for the pregnant subject, nor any other subject that can be, variously, one and one-and-another. My word 'another', here, too, highlights another problem: how difficult it is to find language that does not shore up the already robust, masculine and individualist construction of the allegedly indivisible self; as Tyler asks, "Is it possible to express or represent a subjectivity which defies the category subject?" ("Reframing Pregnant Embodiment" 298).

Given this linguistic limitation, I ask whether it is possible for cinematic image, visual metaphor and narrative to circumvent this problem with subjectivity. Tyler offers the following description of her body in its final month of pregnancy:

And my skin, my skin is ripping apart, veins and stretch marks tattoo me as membranes give way, a dark line runs from navel to crotch where walls of muscle slowly separate. Leaky vessel, I might split apart any moment, pour myself onto the floor in bits. I am not a metaphor, but real alien becoming, perpetually modified. ("Reframing Pregnant Embodiment" 290)

Similarly, Young describes her sense of physical transition thus:

As the months and weeks progress, increasingly I feel my insides, strained and pressed, and increasingly feel the movement of a body inside me. Through pain and blood and water this inside thing emerges between my legs, for a short while both inside and outside me ... [T]he boundaries of my body are themselves in flux. (163)

Compare these accounts to Anna Powell's description of a key scene in British writer-director Clive Barker's 1987 film *Hellraiser*, in which a fragmented body begins to reform and is re-born:

Frank's disembodied organs are determined to be reunited. [...] The sound of a beating heart begins and we see organs without a body begin to self-

generate. In a strongly visceral image, the blood magically gathers below the [floor]boards to form a red lung or heart-like sac, which starts to palpitate... [T]wo tentacle-like arms thrust themselves through a *mélange* of milky gore. The arms are followed by the semblance of a head, with glittering brain folds rapidly forming. (*Deleuze and Horror Film* 85)

It is easy to see how clearly this descriptive engagement with – and, perhaps, parsing of – pregnancy and birth mirrors the language and metaphor of body horror. This relationship is made obvious in Julia Kristeva's psychoanalytic work *Powers of Horror*, in which she notes the importance of the impurity of and the taboo surrounding the maternal and birthing body in the Old Testament book of Leviticus, for instance, in its connection to the impurity of the decaying body (91, 99-102). It also recurs frequently in Mikhail Bakhtin's sociocultural analysis of the carnival and the grotesque in *Rabelais and his World*, such as in his statement that "One of the fundamental tendencies of the grotesque image of the body is to show two bodies in one: the one giving birth and dying, the other conceived, generated, and born [... such as] the pregnant and begetting body" (26). Here, life is inextricably intertwined with death, and the birthing body comes to be linked to other ambivalent forms of bodily excess, transgression, and renewal, in particular defecation and other images of the "lower stratum" (175; see also 151 and 163). I cite these examples from Bakhtin and Kristeva not to cast Tyler's and Young's experience as inherently negative, although the language the latter use does imply a degree of ambiguity, even tenebrosity; after all, Bakhtin's formulation of the grotesque is overall effusive and celebratory. Rather, I consider whether or not horror, which shares so many visceral and aesthetic attributes with pregnancy, may be a space in which dominant modes of pregnant embodiment may be critiqued. So, after considering the key attributes in the representation of and engagement with pregnant subjectivity in the horror film – an area that includes the representation of foetal personhood and abortion – I will return to the question of whether this genre, with its vested interest in fears, anxieties and corporeality, offers any significant challenge to the model of the indivisible individual.



## THE BODY, ABSTRACTED: THE DISPLACEMENT OF THE SUBJECT

Representations of pregnancy and birth in American film were almost non-existent in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Sarah Arnold points to a number of factors that impacted upon the representation of pregnancy in horror film, in particular the loosening, then rejection, of the moral censorship rules in the Motion Picture Production Code (1930 – 1967) in the United States. The Code stated that, until December 1956, “Scenes of actual child birth, in fact or in silhouette, are never to be presented”, and that from 1957, such scenes should be shown “treated with discretion and restraint within the careful limits of good taste” (see Oliver 27-9), much as discussions of pregnancy itself were excluded from public discourse in the 1940s and 1950s (Longhurst, “Corporeographies” 457); similarly, abortion was deemed to be a taboo subject.<sup>7</sup> The dissolution of the Code was shortly followed by a growing interest in pregnancy in both feminist academic spheres, such as in Adrienne Rich’s 1976 book *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, and in the public eye, as evidenced by the development and publication of the seminal American popular women’s health manual *Our Bodies, Ourselves* in the early 1970s (Arnold 154). Kelly Oliver posits that this interest in the representation of pregnancy in the horror film, from *Rosemary’s Baby* on, centred on a broader cultural “focus on the fetus” (30), which was shaped by the confluence of technology with such American social milestones as the opening of the first sperm bank in 1972 and landmark abortion case *Roe v Wade* in 1973, as well as the ongoing development of ultrasound imaging techniques which for the first time made visible – in some form – the gestating foetus.

Engagements with the representation of pregnancy in the horror film predominantly revolve around its relationship to abjection. Kelly Oliver argues that “in horror films both the sex[ual intercourse] and the pregnant body are threatening. The sex is violent and the pregnancy abject” (32); similarly, Sarah Arnold states that “pregnancy is represented in terms of the horrific and the abject”. Arnold asserts that

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<sup>7</sup> From 1951 to 1956 the Code stated that “Abortion, sex hygiene and venereal diseases are not proper subjects for theatrical motion pictures”; prior to this, the topic of abortion was presumably covered under the instructions regarding “sex perversion” and “sex hygiene”. After December 1956, the amended code stated that “The subject of abortion shall be discouraged, shall never be more than suggested, and when referred to shall be condemned. It must never be treated lightly, or made the subject of comedy. Abortion shall never be shown explicitly or by inference, and a story must not indicate that an abortion has been performed, the word “abortion” shall not be used”. See “The Production Code” for an interactive copy of the Code that covers its various iterations between 1934 and 1967, with in depth examples.

these films “collapse any distinction between the biological state of pregnancy and the psychical imago of motherhood” (154), and that the abject body comes to be negated through a “discourse of essential motherhood” (155), in which the self-sacrificing mother gives her all for her child. I argue that this perspective lacks nuance. There is no doubt that the biological state of pregnancy and its representation can be considered with regards to the abject – as has been done so, repeatedly, by authors such as Barbara Creed and Julia Kristeva. Pregnancy may be, as Arnold argues, conflated with motherhood in terms of narrative, but this does not mean that a reading or analysis of a film must in turn shore up this conflation. Rather, here I assert that the articulation of pregnancy (*as its own corporeal state*) in these films can be unpacked in terms of how the subjectivity of the pregnant woman is both constructed and displaced through two key horror tropes: the treatment of the woman as vessel within the religious horror, as presented in the film *The Reaping* (Hopkins US 2007), and the treatment of the woman as both literal and metaphorical environment, in the ecohorror *Prophecy* (Frankenheimer US 1979). In each representation the woman-as-subject and the foetus-as-subject do not happily co-exist; rather, they struggle for dominance, and in each, the woman’s subject position comes to be subordinate to the foetus – or creature – she is carrying. This negation, or abstraction, is not simply an acquiescence to the child within that “situates the pregnant woman safely within the patriarchal economy” (155), as Arnold states, but a site of profound conflict where the borders of the body are actively contested, erased and redrawn. This struggle is a specific and visceral reminder that the way we consider the relationship between ‘self’ and ‘other’ is inadequate.

## THE PREGNANT BODY IN RELIGIOUS HORROR

Pregnancy is a recurring motif in horror films with religious and apocalyptic themes. It is significant that, over decades, the tension between the embodied subjectivity of the woman and that of the unborn child, who is posited as “important” in some sense, has remained significant to the films’ narratives. In *God Told Me To* (Cohen US 1976), a virgin is impregnated by what may be an alien or an angel, and her devoutly Catholic son, in adulthood, comes to have a special, perhaps Biblically ordained, part to play in a series of bizarre murders. In *The Seventh Sign* (Schultz US 1988), pregnant

woman Abby's unborn child is of eschatological significance: he has no soul, but if he is born this way he will bring about the apocalypse, so Abby chooses to die, sacrificing herself so that her soul may be transferred to him. In *The Prophecy II* (Spence US 1998), the Archangel Gabriel must protect a woman so that her unborn child, a human-angel hybrid, may survive, as his coming is meant to herald a truce between warring factions in heaven. In *Legion* (Stewart US 2010), waitress Charlie's baby is to be the saviour of mankind, and they are offered protection by the Archangel Michael against the supernatural forces that would have them destroyed. The influence of *Rosemary's Baby* is clear in these films, too: in *Warlock: The Armageddon* (Hickox US 1993), a young woman is supernaturally impregnated and gives birth to Satan's son (who skins her, and uses her stretched out belly skin to form a map that reveals the locations of magical items) and in *Born* (Friedman US 2007), a virgin becomes mysteriously pregnant and is controlled by her demonic foetus, which needs her to kill people so that it may be born the Antichrist. This influence is also apparent in contemporary texts: the first season of American cable show *American Horror Story*, which screened in 2011, revolves around a supernatural rape followed by a demonic pregnancy that may have resulted in the Antichrist.<sup>8</sup> In each of these representations the pregnant woman is no longer herself. She becomes a pawn in a cosmic game of good and evil, with her womb (and thus, synecdochically, her whole self) as the "container" (Young 160) or "vessel" (Tyler, "Reframing pregnancy embodiment" 290) for a life deemed more important than her own.<sup>9</sup>

This construction in religious horror is largely informed by pop cultural images and representations of Judeo-Christian religions, predominantly Catholicism, which acts as the moral backbone of the two seminal religious horror films, *Rosemary's Baby* and *The Exorcist* (Friedkin US 1973).<sup>10</sup> The result is that the woman's body becomes abstracted: she is a fleshy stand-in for an incorporeal, spiritual battle that is greater

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<sup>8</sup> This trope also appears in *Devil's Due* (Bettinelli-Olpin and Gillett US 2014) and the found footage horror film *Delivery* (Netto US 2013), both of which are due for international release in 2014.

<sup>9</sup> Even the pregnancy that sits at the centre of teen gothic romance franchise *The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn Part 1* (Condon US 2011) is framed as "special"; Bella, a human, is impregnated by her vampire husband Edward and is consumed from the inside out by her hybrid offspring, who is deemed both exceptional and dangerous. The baby literally breaks Bella's body, and Edward must perform an emergency caesarean (with his teeth!) that kills Bella, which leads to her conversion to vampirism.

<sup>10</sup> This is parodied in the horror comedy *Hell Baby* (Garant and Lennon US 2013): the film's demonic birth scene directly references the exorcism sequences of *The Exorcist*, as the possessed birthing mother is tended to by two chain-smoking priests, who form the Vatican's "elite exorcism" team. See Hong for a thorough overview of the representation of religion in horror films.

than her. This emphasises that the woman's body is not "hers" and hers alone. Firstly, she must struggle with an already split subjectivity through her relationship with her foetus; secondly, she must subdue or sacrifice her physical and psychological sense of self in the knowledge that she must also bear the child for the good (or ill) of all humanity – a sacrifice similar to the virgin sacrifices discussed in chapter two of this thesis. As such, I assert that these films posit that the woman's body is not just "decentred, split or doubled" (Young 160) but requisitioned, so that she must *necessarily* submit and defer to another, internal and far more important Other. Such a designation asks of each woman the mythic selflessness of the Virgin Mary, and sometimes invokes the Immaculate Conception (see Kristeva, "Stabat Mater") through romanticising the sacrifice that each woman must make to ensure her foetus's survival.

### ***THE REAPING: THE PREGNANT BODY AS VESSEL***

This tension is evident in the 2007 religious horror film *The Reaping*, which uses such a demonic pregnancy as a plot twist. However, unlike the films mentioned above, it is not simply that pregnancy marks the body as unruly or abstracted; rather it is the woman's body's nascent capacity for reproduction that marks her as both vulnerable to attack and corporeally transgressive. The protagonist Katherine Winter was once a minister, but lost her faith after her daughter and husband were murdered in a sacrificial killing while they were working in Sudan – a positioning that, like the Middle Eastern opening of *The Exorcist*, signifies a racial (that is, non-white) evil from 'without'. Katherine now works as a theologian-cum-miracle debunker, and she is invited by a science teacher called Doug to a Louisiana town called Haven that seems to be experiencing the biblical plagues. She discovers that the plagues are real, but that the strange girl at the centre of the occurrences, Loren, is not a force for evil but rather an angel come to protect the world from the townspeople. The town has formed a Satanic cult that kills all second-born children in an attempt to make a child with the "eyes of the Devil" – another reference to *Rosemary's Baby* – and Doug had been charged with convincing Katherine (as an ordained servant of God) to kill the girl. At the film's climax, the townspeople are destroyed by lightning and fire from the sky, and Loren and Katherine escape. However, in the film's final moments Loren 'hears' a child inside

Katherine, which is the second-born child that the townspeople were hoping to bring into the world as an emissary of Satan, thus repositioning evil both within the United States<sup>11</sup> and within a woman's body. The film, then, undermines the strong female lead so that she becomes valued for only her maternal and reproductive capacities; she is not a subject but a set of corporeal attributes and potentialities. This insemination also draws from classical understandings of reproduction: within Aristotle's patrilinear framework of reproduction, the woman's womb provided both the environment and raw matter for the growth of the foetus, whose form was placed there by the male 'generator' (Tuana, "The Weaker Seed" 150).

The surprise ending marks Katherine's body as lacking boundaries and her subject position as tenuous. Prior to her discovery of the cult, Katherine dreams of a sexual encounter with Doug in which the two have passionate sex in a room lit by fire and candles. The dream is framed as fervid and erotic, and Katherine wakes up confused, aroused and drenched in sweat. However, the film's twist is accompanied by flashbacks of the 'dream' that frame the sex as bestial and vicious, directly referencing the hallucinatory, demonic conception of the Antichrist in *Rosemary's Baby*. The distorted, supernatural sexual coercion is visually and narratively framed in a very problematic way – the impregnation happens against her will and knowledge, although in her dream-state she is presented as "wanting it" – but until the film's end Katherine is wholly oblivious that it ever actually happened. The idea that her body was violated in such a manner taints Katherine's realisation with disgust and guilt, which is compounded as the underlying physical attraction between Katherine and Doug had initially followed the narrative patterns of a traditional romantic subplot; the trajectory of subconscious desire, seduction and rape overtly reinforces the social script of 'victim blaming', where someone who has been raped is framed as a responsible party in the act.<sup>12</sup> The horror of the revelation plays in large part upon the division between

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<sup>11</sup> It is worth noting though that Louisiana is also framed as a mystical 'Other' within American culture, in part due to its historic association with supernatural subcultures such as New Orleans voodoo, a syncretic folk religion that arrived developed within the African diaspora following the arrival of slave populations in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Louisiana and New Orleans are also important within the tradition of the literary Southern Gothic (Boyd) and Bernice M. Murphy highlights Louisiana as a key site in what she calls the American backwoods horror film (151). Nonetheless, much of the terror of the rural gothic comes from the positioning of the radical, monstrous Other within the United States.

<sup>12</sup> As Nicola Gavey points out, such "rape myths serve to actively support rape by providing mechanisms through which rapists can be excused for rape, women can be blamed for rape, and rape by intimates can be called something other than rape" (37).

Katherine's intellectual capabilities and her lack of embodied awareness; unlike Rosemary, who is troubled by the night of conception and at least perceives that her physical boundaries have somehow been breached, Katherine is both ignorant of what has happened to her body – and perhaps betrayed by it – and to the growing foetus within.

This disjunction between Katherine's mind and Katherine's body is highlighted by Loren's ability to 'hear' Katherine's unborn child. Katherine's ignorance of her newly pregnant host-state, when juxtaposed with Loren's hyper-awareness of the foetus's presence, emphasises an abstraction of her body that marks it transparent – it is both there and not there. This frames Katherine's body as inherently lesser – vulnerable, penetrable, exhibiting the 'to-be-fucked-ness' that Andrea Dworkin applies to the virgin body (Dworkin 85) – while criticising her for her lack of embodied awareness. The fact that she used to have a daughter is referred to as a point of pathos, and Katherine's back story ostensibly provides her character with a motivation that is driven by profound personal loss and cynicism but that allows her to connect with Loren. In this sense Katherine's reproductive capacity is like Chekhov's gun: always in the background but ultimately key to the film's plot and purpose. However, the film makes a distinction between Katherine as a person with agency and Katherine as a person with a (passive) body that can bear children in that when Katherine embodies and embraces the attributes of female fertility and sexuality, through her interest in Doug and her reaction to her erotic dream, she lacks agency. Thus, Katherine-as-(intellectual) subject is betrayed by her biology; it is not that Katherine (as *cogito*) is portrayed as weak (although she is portrayed as gullible), it is that her woman-ness<sup>13</sup> is inherently, biologically fallible (see Tuana, "The Weaker Seed"). As with other religious thrillers, there is a sense of fatalism; so, either Katherine's inherent fallibility (as human, or woman, or both) has created a terrible situation, or she is part of some larger, pre-ordained 'plan' which likewise undermines her agency and free will. <sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> See also my discussion of interiority in chapter one; in this instance, Katherine-as-interior is a violable space, rather than a human subject.

<sup>14</sup> It is notable that the film's ending ignores the possibility of abortion. The final moments are full of dread, leaving unarticulated the horror that Katherine is pregnant with the Antichrist, and that the child will (presumably) bring about the end of the world. It may be a reflection of the religious tone of the film, its setting in an area known for its Christian heritage, or Katherine's previous role as an ordained

**PROPHECY: THE PREGNANT BODY AS ENVIRONMENT**

In *The Reaping* Katherine's fallible, female body is presented as a vessel for a satanic emissary, but in the 1979 environmental horror *Prophecy*, the pregnant woman is erased as she is cast as both a literal environment for her unborn child and a proxy for the environment itself. Idealistic public health expert Dr Robert Verne takes a job with the Environmental Planning Agency, for whom he is to write a report about a paper mill's logging operation in Maine, which is in an increasingly antagonistic dispute with the area's indigenous peoples – a “political football” but a job that will have “permanent impact”. He is accompanied by his wife, Maggie, a musician. She is pregnant but has not told Robert, and she fears that he will dissuade her from having the baby by arguing that “the world's in such a mess that it's unfair to bring a child into it, that there are three million unwanted children”. One of her orchestral colleagues tells her “it's your body and it's your choice [... and] if you get talked into an abortion you don't want, you'll never forgive yourself.” This establishes from the outset that Maggie both wants to keep the baby, and that the way she exercises her choice has both personal and political significance.

As they travel to Maine the film's extensive aerial and outdoor photography highlights the beauty of the land: the rivers, forests, lakes and mountains appear to be pristine and untouched by human hand. While the area's native peoples are framed as antagonists by the lumber company, it is quickly clear that their claim to the land is both lawful and just, and that the company's claims of being peaceful and environmentally responsible are outright fabrications. Native American John Hawkes, who takes on the romanticised role of modernised noble savage, tells Robert that the environment isn't just rocks and trees; “the environment is us, and it has been mangled”. The presence of the paper mill is having horrific physical effects on his community, the local wildlife is growing and behaving strangely, and it is as if the very presence of the intruders – that is, the white industrialists – has upset a pre-existing balance and has caused nature to revolt. This metaphor is taken further, for while the native peoples are originally

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minister, or merely narratively expedient, but it is a peculiar omission and one that will be discussed later in the chapter.

charged with laziness and drunkenness by the industrialists, it is demonstrated that these affects are symptoms of larger social and ecological ills.

Meanwhile, there are constant visual and figurative reminders of Maggie's undisclosed pregnancy. A Native American woman who acts as a midwife remarks that those babies that aren't stillborn are being born with abnormalities. An enormous tadpole is caught in a pond. The revelation of the extent of the lumber company's pollution coincides with the appearance of a horrifically disfigured mutated mother bear in search of her cubs, and Robert realises that any pregnant animal that eats the fish from the river will give birth to a "monster". Later, as Robert tends to a mutated bear cub, Maggie finally reveals that she is pregnant. His first instinct is to reassure her that he will support her through an abortion, but the rhetoric of choice reappears; Maggie tearfully tells him that she couldn't bear to kill the foetus. Robert turns his attention to the mangled face of the mewling, struggling animal, cementing the connection between the monster within and the monster without, but rather than being empowered in her reproductive decision-making, Maggie is psychologically cast as the irresponsible hysteric. Physically, the bear cub frames Maggie's body as animal and unruly, for as Barbara Creed notes, "woman, because of her reproductive capabilities, is not far removed from the world of nature" (*The Monstrous-Feminine* 44). Significantly, this externalisation of the foetus serves to displace and silence Maggie. There is no mention of the damage that the mercury poisoning may do to *her*, *vis-à-vis* the foetus, even though they have seen the terrible results of the poisoning on the indigenous community. Peculiarly, as viewers, we are asked to identify with Maggie as the protagonist – something that is made evident by her top billing in the film's credits – but she is given very few strong character traits over and above her obsession with her pregnancy: she exists in the film only to be pregnant, and to be the container for a something that will invoke both pity and horror.

Thus, Maggie's body acts as an explicit stand in for the natural environment, while also acting as a "maternal environment" (Tyler, "Skin-tight" 72) for the foetus. Like the forest and the waterways, Maggie appears 'well' while hiding evidence of sickness and pollution. The horror of the film is not that her wellbeing is at stake, but that she has inadvertently poisoned her unborn child. On one hand, Maggie's subjectivity is undermined by treating her as a (tainted) vessel for her child. On the



other Maggie is framed as somehow culpable – for her lack of disclosure, for her ingestion of the mercury-poisoned fish during a romantic dinner, and finally for her insistence that she won't abort the foetus. On one hand, the film's simplistic, essentialist representation of the Native Americans frames them as a people who are more "in touch" with nature than their white counterparts. On the other, the film's treatment of Maggie-as-environment displaces their indigenous authority and relationship with the land, while also framing Maggie's ignorance of her body, as a white woman, as something 'foolish'.

Perversely, this also situates Maggie's pregnant body within the dominant western medical model that frames pregnant bodies as inherently risky, "inevitably deviating from the norm, as vulnerable and susceptible to a range of ills" (Lupton 63). Her womb is a dangerous place for the vulnerable foetus twofold: it is both as a place from which it can be aborted, and a place where it will grow into an abnormal creature. This risk discourse surrounding pregnancy has been extrapolated to frame mothers as monstrous: within the public mindset, fetuses need protection from their own bearers, and "the female body is represented predominantly as a source of danger for the fetuses" (Lupton 66). It is also notable that the threat to Maggie's unborn baby is framed as more important than the threat to her or to any of the other people, particularly the non-white communities they interact with. This is deeply ironic given the film's alleged interest in social and environmental justice. At the beginning of the film Robert is investigating poor living conditions in inner city tenements, and he treats an African American infant who has become sick after being bitten by a rat. He is utterly disillusioned by the systematic maltreatment of these communities and the job offer with the EPA is pitched to him as an endeavour that is "worth" something – the implication being that the Sisyphean task he is engaged in isn't, and that perhaps his work is ultimately more about himself than it is about the people he is tending to. Similarly, his treatment of the unwell Native Americans is more about collecting evidence than it is about healing the ailing community.

The film's climax draws from explicit images of the monstrous maternal so as to provide the viewer with a specific visual reminder about the damage that is being done to both the environment and to Maggie's body. The characters are pursued through the forest by the mutated mother bear, and Robert and tribal spokesman John Hawkes fight

back, although John is killed in the fracas, leaving the white visitor to act as saviour. Robert lands the killing blows by leaping into the river and stabbing the incapacitated bear to death with an arrow, continuing his frenzied attack long after the animal has died, until the body begins to sink. This act of gratuitous violence against the monstrous maternal is juxtaposed against a scene of the married couple flying away in a small plane; Maggie is in a stretcher and when she wakes Robert strokes her face in a rare moment of softness and unspoken communication. However, in the river below them another mutated bear, larger and more vicious than the first, rises from the water and roars at the camera in an explicit example of Robin Wood's return of the repressed. Robert may have defeated the immediate threat, but the reminder is clear – the pollution in the environment has caused horrific damage that cannot be undone, evidence of this damage is still growing inside of Maggie, although the outcome of Maggie's pregnancy is left unstated. Further, while Maggie and Robert have the privilege of being able to fly away from the scene of the ecological crime, the threat – both interior and environmental – is only temporarily contained. While the film invokes a degree of countercultural social consciousness, given its professed interest in ecology, the environment, indigenous rights, and issues of race and class, this ending is cynical and starkly conservative; firstly, the privileged white couple is able to 'return' to their 'normal' lives, and secondly, they have been quite literally tainted by their experience with the Other.

## FOETAL VISIBILITY AND THE DISSOLUTION OF THE FEMALE SUBJECT

The storylines of both *The Reaping* and *Prophecy* rely upon the viewer's acceptance that the pregnant woman and her foetus are separate entities. Each woman is, corporeally, a vessel or a maternal environment for her foetus, a designation that potentially reframes the pregnant woman as object rather than subject, or at least complicates the relationship between autonomous *cogito* and the embodied self (see Sneddon 189). This reflects broader conceptualisations of pregnant subjectivity, for as Robyn Longhurst states, "Pregnant bodies trouble binary thinking. They undergo a bodily process that transgresses the boundary between inside and outside, self and other, subject and object, and often male and female (when women carry boys)."

(*Maternities* 4) The result of this binary thinking is a model of subjectivity that relies on oppositional difference, such that the 'I' is contrasted with the 'not I' (Shildrick, "Monsters" 308). This 'not I' is able to be rendered visible in visual media such as film: while the demonic foetus inside of Katherine is heard, rather than seen, the foetus inside of Maggie is given an avatar in the form of the mutated bear cub, and it is this explicit visibility that accentuates the competing subjectivity inside of her. This foetal visibility speaks to a broader and highly contentious issue in the consideration of pregnant subjectivity: foetal subjectivity, and its impact upon the way that the pregnant subject is understood.

Our modern day understanding of the foetus and its image has largely come about during the last 50 years. Early investigations into the development of the foetus were undertaken by anatomists and embryologists, whose work relied on specimens retrieved from miscarriage and autopsy (Morgan 47). Beyond the mother's experience of the 'quickening' and hands-on physical examination of the woman's body, the beginning of the 'emergence', so to speak, of the human foetus came in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the development of a rudimentary but effective foetal stethoscope by French doctor Adolphe Pinard (Johnson 360). In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, X-ray machines were used to take images of the foetus, although the process was cumbersome and – in hindsight – dangerous, and produced indistinct images. More revealing modern imaging techniques began with the development of foetal heart rate monitoring, which was first successfully trialled in 1958 (Freeman et al. 3), and the emergence of ultrasound (or sonographic) monitoring, which was developed during World War One, but which came to prominence as an obstetric diagnostic tool in the 1960s. Recent technological advances such as 3- and 4-dimensional scans have rendered the foetus visible in ways that had been formerly impossible, and with socially interesting outcomes; for instance, beyond their use as diagnostic tools, scanned images and videos are used to help the prospective parent(s) bond with their unborn child (Mitchell 4). These images are, of course, not at all neutral nor self evident; rather, they exist within very specific cultural, economic and historical contexts and are subject to a variety of interpretive strategies.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> For an analysis of such strategies, see Kelly Joyce's ethnographic research on the way that MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) examinations and images are read and interpreted by medical professionals.

Further, in each the female body is designated as an impediment, a boundary to be breached and something to be looked through.<sup>16</sup>

Other forms of technology have made the previously hidden foetal environment / pregnant uterus a site of fascination; in particular, Swedish photojournalist Lennart Nilsson's landmark foetal photography has served as a powerful tool in framing the mechanics of reproduction and foetal development in both the popular and scientific imagination. Nilsson's iconic colour images, first published in his book *A Child is Born*, were taken with specially designed wide-angle lenses. These images, some of which famously featured in the 30 April 1965 issue of LIFE magazine under the title "The Drama of Life Before Birth", depict embryos and fetuses at various stages of development<sup>17</sup>. The photos are lit and composed in such a way that the fetuses are enigmatic, decontextualised artefacts: they appear to be floating freely in an expansive, boundless environment, rather than situated, physically, within the body of a woman (Kaplan 204), a designation that the phrase "life before birth" accentuates. One image in particular, a luminous photo of a 20 week old fetus sucking its thumb (fig. 3.1), has been re-circulated and referenced extensively, notably inspiring the image of the 'star child' who, at the conclusion of Stanley Kubrick's 1968 film *2001: A Space Odyssey* (fig. 3.2), signals transcendent re-birth and the beginning of humanity's next stage of evolution. Indeed, Nilsson's work was deemed to have been so historically significant and influential that copies of two of his images were included on the 'golden record', the collection of images and sounds that is accompanying the space probes Voyager 1 and 2 on their journeys out of the solar system (Hassner). These images have taken on political significance, too: pro-life activists have regularly co-opted them as visual signifiers of the beauty of pre-born life (J. Taylor 1; Sandlos 81; Stabile 144-7), even though, rather than being candid shots, many of Nilsson's photographs were deliberately posed and lit. Like the embryologists before him, Nilsson created some of

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<sup>16</sup> A great deal has been written about these issues. As a representative sample, and for detailed discussions of the development of such imagery, its ambiguities and its political and philosophical implications, see medical researcher Julie Roberts' *The Visualised Foetus: A Cultural and Political Analysis of Ultrasound Imagery*, anthropologist Lisa M. Mitchell's *Baby's First Picture: Ultrasound and the Politics of Fetal Subjects*, and medical anthropologist Janelle S. Taylor's *The Public Life of the Fetal Sonogram: Technology, Consumption and the Politics of Reproduction*. The University of Cambridge's online exhibition, "Making Visible Embryos" (Buklijas and Hopwood), offers an extensive and accessible visual history of the subject.

<sup>17</sup> See "Lennart Nilsson Photography – A Child Is Born" for a collection of images and a discussion of the technology involved.



**Fig. 3.1 Inner space:** Swedish photographer Lennart Nilsson's famous photograph of a 20-week old foetus sucking its thumb (Lennart Nilsson Photography).



**Fig. 3.2 Outer space:** The 'star child', who appears at the end of *2001: A Space Odyssey*, explicitly draws from Nilsson's imagery and represents humanity's transcendent re-birth.

his images using aborted, ectopic and miscarried fetuses, some of which were removed from dead women (Newman 10): the still lives of dead fetuses, arranged on an impersonal background.

This increased foetal visibility, the elision of the physical woman and the associated "ontological enhancement of the fetus" (Michaels 117), has resulted in a legal and medical emphasis upon the foetus "not just as a passive object of moral concern, but as a quasi-autonomous self" (Shildrick, *Leaky Bodies* 200): the foetus *qua* foetus, as

politico-legal subject and individual. However, despite “the fetus’s complete physiological dependence on and interrelatedness with the body of the woman” (Johnsen, 606), foetal personhood as a construct can effect an adversarial, if not outright antagonistic, relationship between the foetus and the mother (Michaels 113, Johnsen 599). The issue of foetal personhood now forms a significant role in debates about abortion, health and contraception, particularly in the distinction between whether or not a foetus – or even a zygote – is a person or has a “right to life” in the eyes of the law, a discussion that draws as heavily from religious doctrine as it does from the field of human and bio-ethics (for example, see Rae). Lisa McLennan Brown notes that “historically, the foetus only acquired legal rights separate from those of the woman at birth” (90-1), but that statutes, common law and proposed legislative changes with a focus on the foetus-as-subject have eroded the requirement of live birth.<sup>18</sup> The redefinition of a foetus as a citizen with all the same rights of a ‘born’ citizen has potentially serious ramifications not only for pregnant women (see Morice-Brubaker), but also for stem cell research, cloning, *in vitro* fertilisation, health insurance, family law, certain types of contraception including the emergency contraceptive pill and intrauterine devices, and medical issues such as molar or non-viable pregnancies. Such a reclassification also has a significant impact upon the pregnant subject. The debates surrounding these issues in the United States are representative of the way such issues are being considered around the world. For instance, Lynn Paltrow, executive director of the United States’s National Advocates for Pregnant Women, has argued, “there is no way to treat fertilized eggs, embryos and foetuses as separate constitutional persons without subtracting pregnant women from the community of constitutional persons” (Calhoun). Similarly, American legal scholar Edward B. Goldman argues that “creating

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<sup>18</sup> An example of such changes in the United States is the state of Mississippi’s failed Initiative 26, a 2011 proposition, which “would [have] amend[ed] the Mississippi Constitution to define the word “person” or “persons”, as those terms are used in Article III of the state constitution, to include every human being from the moment of fertilization, cloning, or the functional equivalent thereof” (Mississippi Life Begins at the Moment of Fertilization Amendment, Initiative 26 (2011)). This would mean that a fertilised egg would be accorded the same rights – legal and human – as any other citizen. This Mississippi initiative is one of a number of similar American legislative challenges to have emerged in the last ten years; however, they are ostensibly a means by which to criminalise the practise of abortion in defiance of *Roe v Wade*, in which the US Supreme court ratified a womans’s right to an abortion so long as the foetus isn’t ‘viable’. This is demonstrated by pro-life lobby group Personhood USA’s claim that their definition of a person “terrifies the pro-abortion foes!” as “they know that if we clearly define the preborn baby as a person, they will have the same right to life as all Americans do!” (“What is Personhood?”)

"personhood" for fertilized eggs would dehumanize born human beings",<sup>19</sup> because of its implication of a symmetrical, rather than an asymmetrical, relationship between the self-based autonomy and 'property rights' of the two bodies (Sneddon 194, 195-6).

### **INSIDE: COMPETING SUBJECTS**

What these examples strongly indicate is that the notion of pregnant subjectivity is challenged and complicated by foetal personhood. The inadequacies of the 'autonomous individual' model of subjectivity are starkly obvious, for an emphasis on the subjectivity of the foetus that comes at the expense of the pregnant woman's bodily sovereignty results in the abstraction or elision of the woman, who is "not present in the medical language, which speaks only of "maternal environments" and "alternative reproductive vehicles"" (Raymond xv), such that the woman then acts as a glorified incubator (Raymond 48). This pits the needs of the pregnant woman against the needs of the foetus in what, sometimes, is framed as a zero-sum game; Margrit Shildrick points out, "as the [famous] anti-abortion video, *The Silent Scream* [(Dabner US 1984)], illustrates, it is not just that the developing foetus is characterised as having an identity counterposed to that of the mother, but that the mother as a subject identity in her own right may be entirely absent" (201; see also Kaplan 204) or be presented as an invisible threat to the foetus, a 'hostile' environment. As such, the image of the foetus becomes loaded with significance, and the way that such images are presented and (re-)circulated in popular culture actively draws from and simultaneously informs dominant understandings of pregnant and foetal subjectivity.

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<sup>19</sup> Aside from the debate over personhood, fetuses do have legal standing, such as in cases of inheritance or parental custody and within the law of torts. In the United States, a child *in utero* can be considered a legal victim under the "Unborn Victims of Violence Act of 2004 (Public Law 108-212)" if they are killed or injured during the commission of a violent crime – although the perpetrator does not have to have been aware that the mother was pregnant for the law to be in effect. A recent and highly unusual case in New Zealand focused on a pregnant woman, "Nikki", who was to give birth during a pornographic film. The chief social worker for the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services (CYFS) applied to the High Court to have the unborn child placed under the guardianship of the court under the Guardianship Act 1968 to protect its rights and interests until it was born. The application, which was granted, also prohibited the filming of the labour and birth, the simulation of those images, any publication of images of the unborn child, and publication of any images of information that would identify the unborn child. However, the court made clear that its decision did not imply that Nikki would be an unfit mother – although it noted that her interest in stardom was overriding her better judgement – and that the rights of the mother must not, where possible, be impinged upon by the court: that would be "an invasive step which should only be taken for very good reasons" (Heath J, *Re an Unborn Child* [2003], 1 NZLR 115 [28]; see also Bartlett).

The deployment of the foetal subject is an explicit visual and narrative strategy in French horror film *Inside (À l'intérieur)* (Bustillo and Maury FR 2009). The film begins with a car crash that leaves heavily pregnant photographer Sarah widowed and traumatised. On Christmas Eve, the night before she is due to have the birth induced, Sarah is terrorised in her home by a ominous black-clad woman, credited only as *la femme* (the woman), who knows Sarah's name and all about the death of her husband. *La femme* breaks into the house while Sarah, dressed all in white, sleeps, and her intention is to take Sarah's baby from inside her by force. She stabs Sarah in the stomach with a large pair of scissors, and this trauma sends Sarah into labour. As Sarah barricades herself in the bathroom, *la femme* picks off, one by one, anyone who enters the house, almost all of whom are authority figures: first Sarah's boss, and then three policemen and a rioter in their custody, and Sarah even accidentally kills her own mother in misguided self defence. Finally, Sarah begins to give birth on the stairs and *la femme*, as dark midwife, assists her. She finally cuts the baby out of Sarah's belly with her shears, and she leaves Sarah, gutted and almost inside-out, to bleed to death. The final shadowy image is that of the woman in black, like a dark Madonna, sitting in a nursing chair clutching the baby to her in a debased reflection of nativity iconography.

Although the home invasion narrative centres on the struggle between the two women, *Inside* is not a *pas-de-deux*. At key moments the unborn child, floating in the womb, appears as the film's computer-generated third key character. The child is explicitly connected to the uterus but appears to float freely, much like the fetuses in Lennart Nilsson's photography, and his image draws explicitly from the iconography and visual style of modern imaging technologies, which imparts a sense of veracity. As co-director Julien Maury states, in post-production "the editor came one day and he said we missed the third character and that it's a story of three, a triangle. So we have the two main characters that are fighting for what? They are fighting for the third so we *must see the third*" (emphasis mine) ("40<sup>th</sup> Sitges"). As such we occupy a peculiar, privileged viewing position – we are 'inside' the woman's body with the child while remaining distanced, as if we are viewing him in an aquarium or through a glass wall.

The primacy of the foetal subject is apparent from the beginning of the film. During the title sequence, the slightly blurred images insinuate torn flesh and viscous,



free flowing blood<sup>20</sup>; a tiny hand reaches out from a wound, bathed in gore and is met and held gently by an adult hand, alluding to the film's horrific Caesarean section. These blurred shapes are overlaid with sonogram images of an unborn child - an unlikely 'before' and 'after' pairing in which the child shifts from technological avatar to flesh-and-blood individual (fig 3.3). The first scene of the film shows an unborn child - clearly very close to full term - floating peacefully within the uterus. Like Nilsson's iconic image, he sucks his thumb, and the image is bathed in a warm, soothing golden glow. A disembodied voice says "my child - my baby - finally inside me - no one will take him from me - no one can hurt him now - no one". The voice is muffled and distant yet everywhere at once, for we hear it from the unborn child's subjective position. There is a squeal of car brakes and the child furrows his brow, as if troubled, and through the enveloping body we hear an horrific car accident. The child is flung forward and seems to hit the camera's lens - that is, the wall of the uterus - and something behind him begins to bleed. The first external shot is of the car accident, the undersaturated cold blue tones of "outside" a contrast to the warm, inviting and comforting dimness of the "inside". The camera circles above the accident, eventually looking through a broken windscreen to Sarah's bloodied face. It lingers, then tilts down to reveal that she is heavily pregnant. This opening sequence is unsettling, not simply because of its content, but because of the way in which the viewer is encouraged to engage with the characters. Our first connection is not with Sarah nor *la femme*, the film's tragic mothers-to-be, but with an unborn child, who is positioned as oblivious passenger and innocent victim. When we are shown Sarah the camera lingers on her face, which establishes her as an individual, but the slow tilt down to her bloodied stomach encourages us to foreground the experience of the unborn child and be more invested in his welfare. The occupant of the other car is not shown at all.

The image of the unborn child reappears in another scene of danger and violence. *La femme* manages to break into the house silently as Sarah lies asleep on her bed. She sterilises a pair of sewing shears and runs their tip slowly, almost lovingly, along Sarah's belly before making an incision near the belly button, and as she draws back, ready to stab, both Sarah and the child wake. They both instinctively thrust their arms upward in a defensive position, the child's actions mimicking that of the mother (fig. 3.4). Shots of

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<sup>20</sup> These opening images are remarkably similar to those in the title sequence of *Alien: Resurrection*, which is discussed in detail in Chapter 5 of this thesis.



**Fig. 3.3 Looking inside:** The opening title sequence of *Inside* pairs blurry, almost abstract images of viscera with sonogram images.



**Fig. 3.4 Mother and child:** As Sarah grimaces and thrusts up her arms in defence, so too does the computer generated image of her unborn child (*Inside*).

Sarah and *la femme* struggling against one another are interposed with shots from 'inside', and as at the beginning of the film, the sound in the uterus is subjective, muffled and murky. The unborn child is also highly expressive, so that his face scrunches up with distress. On one hand, this explicitly aligns the child's welfare, experience and corporeality with Sarah's, linking them as connected entities in a manner that is normally impossible in film. However, it makes it clear that Sarah is not only trying to protect *herself*, but also an entity that has no means by which to protect itself. This increases the stakes in terms of the film's core conflict, but also serves to remind us that it is the child we should be concerned for; Sarah can at least attempt to defend herself, but the vulnerable unborn child can't. This is also the first time we are presented with a tangible link between woman and child for Sarah, in mourning for her husband, approaches the impending birth of the child with grief-stricken indifference and emotional disconnection, her numbed affect emphasised by the cool, grim colour palette of the world outside her home. In the wake of the accident it is implied that Sarah no

longer cares about the baby, but sees the pregnancy as something to be endured - a clear contrast to *la femme's* single minded obsession. It is only late in the film that Sarah summons the wherewithal to actively confront and attack *la femme*, rather than run, hide and grip her swollen stomach.

The film's manipulation of combined and competing subject positions is emphasised when the images of the first scene are revisited at the film's conclusion, when *la femme* reveals that she was the driver of the other car, that she had been fleeing an abusive relationship, and that the accident killed her own unborn child. The knowledge that the child dies recontextualises the film's opening images: the film misleads the audience by encouraging us to believe that the unborn child we see in the opening sequence is Sarah's. While the two children are different, they are presented to the audience – and, perhaps, considered by *la femme* – as one and the same. Maury states above that “we must see the third”, but in doing so conflates the third and fourth – Sarah's child and *la femme's* child – and creates a foetal super-subject. Not only are the mothers' wombs merely temporary homes (and dangerous ones at that!), but the children themselves become monolithic; the importance and subjectivity of the Child outweighs and outstrips that of the mothers.<sup>21</sup>

This manipulation continues during the brutal birthing sequence, in which *la femme* cuts her way through Sarah's belly to remove the child. The title sequence's abstract, visceral images are echoed as the child shifts from digital spectre to fleshy, bloodied individual – a born subject, now independent of his mother's body. *La femme* takes the squalling infant from Sarah's body and the camera, as at the film's beginning, lingers over the image of Sarah. In the film's opening she sits, bloodied and dazed, in her car before the camera tilts down to her pregnant stomach, but this time she lies on the stairs, similarly bloodied, as the camera tracks to the right, revealing the umbilical cord hanging from the gaping, messy wound of her abdomen. It is both depressing and cynical to consider that, perhaps, this is the most honest image of the film: the child, having been born, no longer needs its “[l]eaky vessel” (Tyler, “Reframing pregnant embodiment” 290); Sarah, her role fulfilled, is no longer required, and the foetal subject, in its emergence from biological dependence to independence, remains intact. Despite

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<sup>21</sup> Of course, *la femme* is fighting to attain the subject position of Mother, but the child remains the fixed point around which she and Sarah revolve.

the clear connection between Sarah and the unborn child – a relationship unusual in film – the transparency, penetrability and permeability of the maternal body, that which allowed the God-like viewer to see “inside” explicitly and that has encouraged us to always be mindful of the unborn child, is viscerally realised, while the child remains whole.

## ABORTION AND TABOO

In *Inside*, the subject position of the film’s two fetuses is emphasised for narrative, emotional and visceral effect. This tendency towards privileging the wellbeing of the foetus over that of the mother is also evident in the few horror films that directly engage with the issue of abortion, a fraught issue that best encapsulates the ontological tension between the foetus and the pregnant woman (see Hartouni). This is especially so given that each ‘side’ of the abortion debate frames its cause with regards to human dignity – either the woman’s right to her own body and choice, or the foetus’s right to exist (Rae). However, despite the horrific narrative and aesthetic possibilities, it is highly unusual for abortion to be discussed, let alone depicted, in Anglophone horror film, so it is worth considering those few representations that do exist.<sup>22</sup> In fact, abortion is rarely explicitly addressed in narrative film at all, no matter the genre,<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, abortion appears more frequently in some Asian horror films: in Thai horror film *The Unborn Child* (*Sop Dek* 2002) (Arnon THA 2011) increasingly strange events are caused by the vengeful ghosts of fetuses that have been unceremoniously dumped in a storage locker by a back-alley abortionist. As a ‘pulled from the headlines’ story, it references the discovery in 2010 of the remains of 2002 illegally aborted fetuses in a Buddhist temple, where they had been hidden while they waited to be incinerated. In Hong Kong film *Dumplings* (Chan HK 2004), which was originally released as a short film as part of an East Asian horror film collaboration *Three... Extremes* (Chan Miike and Park HK-JAP-SK 2004), a female chef makes ‘special’ dumplings from aborted fetuses, which she claims have rejuvenating properties. Her client, Mrs Li, enjoys her newfound youth and increased libido and becomes dependent on the dumplings so she helps the chef acquire new ‘ingredients’. Abortion, here, is a gruesome way of addressing vanity and hubris, rather than a political act. See also the discussion of Takashi Miike’s “Imprint” in n34.

<sup>23</sup> See chapter 12 of ethicist David Shaw’s *Morality and the Movies* for a discussion of morality, individual autonomy and abortion in the drama *The Cider House Rules* (Hallström US 1999). Interestingly, abortion is slightly more visible in prime-time television, particularly American cable television, which is far less regulated than its networked counterpart, although there is little scholarly literature written on the topic; see chapter two of Andrea L. Press and Elizabeth R. Cole’s *Speaking of Abortion* for a discussion of class and abortion in American television from 1972 - 2001, and Elise Nagy’s blog “Things We Don’t Talk About In Primetime” for a popular account of abortion storylines in contemporary American television shows. From the perspective of horror, the first season of *American Horror Story* incorporates the issue in a remarkably blatant manner: in the 1920s, the “murder house” at the centre of the first season was an illegal abortion clinic run by the house’s original owner, and it plays a key role in terms of both the

even though abortion itself is not uncommon. For instance, in the United States – which has a fraught and sometimes violent political history when it comes to the issue of abortion – the United States’ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s analysis of reported abortion numbers indicated that in 2008, 16 in 1000 women aged 15 – 44 had an abortion, with a ratio of 234 abortions for every 1000 live births (Pazol et al.). The taboo in American films, at least, reflects the highly politicised status of abortion in the United States. In their analysis of the impact of religion upon American politics, D’Antonio et al. highlight abortion as “one of a variety of issues” (43) that accounts for political divisiveness in federal government, particularly given the shift in the 1980s to the association of specific political affiliations and fixed political identities with specific stances on abortion (47, 49-56). They state that “At the national level, there is little place for dialogue between [pro-life and pro-choice] positions, and polarization is now at a high point in both houses on Congress,” and that controversy over abortion has generated “upheaval that will impact American politics for years to come” (43), particularly in terms of healthcare legislation (59-61).<sup>24</sup> This tension is particularly reflected in American films’ treatment of abortion as a ‘delicate’ issue.<sup>25</sup>

When abortion *is* present in American horror film, it often takes the form of cautionary tale or moral touchstone. It may be presented as a choice of last resort or a choice that is refuted altogether, as in both *Prophecy* and *Rosemary’s Baby*, when each pregnant woman insists that she won’t consider aborting her baby, despite their fears for the foetus. In *Legion*, pregnant waitress Charlie delivers a monologue about how she considered but decided against aborting her child, even though she is terrified to be a mother and isn’t sure she wants the child. Her speech frames abortion as a selfish choice, so her willingness to carry the child is something worldly and selfless; her life is insignificant in the shadow of her unborn child and motherhood is both divine duty and penance for a life poorly lived. However, elsewhere even the mention of abortion carries dangers. The beginning of Larry Cohen’s 1977 film *It’s Alive* portrays a woman giving birth to a deformed child, which promptly kills everyone in the delivery room except the

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themes of the show and the nature of some of the ghosts that haunt the place. See also the discussion of “Pro-Life” later in this chapter.

<sup>24</sup> See Ekland-Olson (25-61) for a detailed discussion of the social, cultural and political context for debates around abortion in the United States.

<sup>25</sup> See also my earlier discussion about the impact of the Motion Picture Production Code in the United States.

mother; there is an insinuation that the child's monstrosity stems from the parents' consideration of abortion, which directly draws from historic assertions that congenital deformities were caused by a woman's monstrous maternal imagination affecting the child *in utero* (Shildrick 310-1).<sup>26</sup> The more recent remake of the film (*It's Alive* (Rusnak US 2008)) takes this inference a step further by positing that the cannibalistic child's monstrosity was directly caused by the mother, Lenore, who had tried, and failed, to kill her foetus with abortion pills she had purchased online. In the original film, the mother is physically and narratively sidelined; the film deals more with the actions of the father as he exhibits fear and hatred of his child before gradually coming to understand that the creature is vulnerable and frightened, a process that mirrors his slow acceptance of fatherhood. In the remake, as with other films about monstrous motherhood, the needs of the child – both born and unborn – come to overwhelm the mother's capacity to provide; this point is developed further in chapter five of this thesis.<sup>27</sup>

The grotesque baby of Cohen's *It's Alive* is a clear influence on three films that feature deformed fetuses who survive abortions. In *The Unborn* (Flender US 1991), which is considered in detail later in the following chapter, Virginia and her husband go to a fertility clinic, but Virginia unwittingly becomes part of a genetic experiment when, as with *Rosemary's Baby*, her husband 'sells' her: he is convinced by the doctor to let Virginia act as an incubator and undergo radical treatment that will "make the baby stronger, more viable in the womb". When Virginia sees and experiences the bizarre and violent side-effects and murderous mood swings the treatment is having on other women, she procures a seedy back alley abortion without the knowledge of her husband, who is outraged and believes that she is hysterical and "incapable of coping with reality". However, the mewling, snapping foetus doesn't die, and Virginia, who feels drawn to its cries, goes back to the dumpster in the alley to retrieve it. The film ends

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<sup>26</sup> See also Steffen Hantke's discussion in "My Baby ate the Dingo". He suggests that films about monstrous infants, such as *It's Alive*, reflect social anxieties about pharmaceuticals and reproductive technology, such as fears about impact of the oral contraceptive pill (released in 1960), as well as the withdrawal of the sedative Thalidomide from the market in 1961 after it was shown to have caused serious foetal abnormalities. (110).

<sup>27</sup> It is worth highlighting the fact that one of the most balanced (that is, least moralistic) inclusions of abortion comes from Bob Clark's Canadian slasher *Black Christmas*, which was released in 1974 and as such predates the American slasher film while also outlining some of what would become some of the subgenre's key tropes. Its eventual heroine, level-headed sorority girl Jess, is adamant that she is going to have an abortion, despite the vocal protestations of her intense and increasingly pushy boyfriend who tells her that she will be "sorry" if she goes through with it. While her boyfriend is not the film's mysterious killer, 'Billy', the film's open ending leaves it unstated as to whether Jess's intention to have an abortion has anything to do with the stalker's rampage through the sorority house.

with the mother comforting the creature, although her intention - to kill it or raise it - remains unclear. This association of pregnancy with possession (Graham) and madness (Ussher, *The Madness of Women* 17-20) draws from a clear historic tradition wherein women are denigrated because of their reproductive capacities. As Virginia says to her deceitful husband, sarcastically, "I'd tell someone, but I'm paranoid with a history of mental illness".

In other articulations of abortion, the foetus's subjectivity and capacity to act may come to totally eclipse that of the mother. This is certainly the case in gory exploitation films, which emphasise the image of deformed fetuses to incite fear, disgust, and even laughter. In the lurid, violent and wholly incoherent *Hanger* (Nicholson CAN 2009), a prostitute has her pregnancy violently aborted by her pimp and she dies in the process, but the disfigured foetus lives and as an adult becomes involved in a plan for filial revenge. In *The Suckling* (Teri US 1990), a woman is coerced into an abortion by her boyfriend, and at the abortion clinic, which doubles as a brothel, the aborted foetus is flushed down the toilet. However, it comes into contact with toxic waste in the sewers, mutates into a monster, and then returns to take its revenge by attacking the inhabitants of the bordello. In both of these films the aborted, disposed-of foetus fights back against the abortionists, exhibiting a greater capacity to act than its mother ever did, while the mother is denigrated for her weakness and objectified through her association with prostitution.<sup>28</sup>

### **'PRO-LIFE' AND *PRO-LIFE***

Each of these films trades on the grotesque image of the aborted foetus and its oppositional relationship to its (sometimes dead) mother, rather than looking to abortion itself. Given the contentious and overwhelmingly political nature of abortion in the United States, it is appropriate that two recent texts that do centre on the act of abortion itself, rather than abortion as a means to an end, are deeply couched in these religious and political discourses. The first, *The Life Zone* (Weber US 2011), is a peculiar

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<sup>28</sup> There is also a fatalistic sense of maternal fallibility here: if the mother relinquishes the foetus she is framed as failing to adhere to the paradigms of both essential and ideal motherhood, whereas by saving a child she doesn't want she is fulfilling the expectations placed upon her by both patriarchy and, perhaps, religious dogma. This is a paradox that I consider further in chapter five of this thesis.



low budget film that has been framed popularly as “the world's first horror movie to push a pro-life agenda” (J. Miller). Even though the film’s writer and producer Kenneth Del Vecchio, a former American municipal judge and would-be senator, suggests in an interview that the audience will walk away not knowing what the filmmaker’s position is (Robb), the film’s press release states that the film’s “climactic twist” ending is clearly anti-abortion (“Press Release”). The film is about incarceration and enforced child-birth, and it dramatises the point of view that a woman is a vessel for her foetus and that her rights are (and should be) totally subsumed during the process of pregnancy, such that the strict conceptual binary between woman and foetus is upheld and enforced through a paradigm of conservative ethics. Three women who were in the process of having an abortion wake up to find that they are being held prisoner in a medical facility. They are spoken to via video conference by the Jailer, a sinister middle-aged man who tells them that they “have all committed a terrible sin”. A doctor, a woman ironically named Dr Wise, will take care of them until she delivers all three children simultaneously, a curious requirement that frames the act of birth as on, one hand, something mechanistic and choreographed and, on the other, a form of shared ecstasy or maternal communion.<sup>29</sup>

The women’s incarceration is as much a re-education programme as an attempt to monitor and enforce the pregnancies, for the three women, who have diverging opinions on abortion, must spend their seven months in captivity reading and watching pro-life material. As such, while the film is marketed as a horror, the captivity narrative is really a framework for a series of Socratic debates on the nature of abortion. Most of these debates are centred on the nature of rights, that is, whether constitutional rights and the woman’s right to self-determination come into conflict with moral rights, although it is clear that the captives’ earthly, legal rights sit at odds with those of the powers detaining them. One of the films viewed is *O.B.A.M. Nude (Occidental Births A Monster)* (Weber US 2009), another film by Del Vecchio and director Rod Weber, which presents a nameless man selling his soul and the souls of all his potential followers to the devil for political gain. The cocaine-snorting marijuana-smoking protagonist of *O.B.A.M. Nude* is clearly a proxy for US President Barack Obama, and the man’s socialist dictatorial dream for the United States is one in which everything is mandated by the

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<sup>29</sup> The film can also be seen as an explicit metaphor for the way that the pregnant body is surveilled. See Lupton (*Risk* 88-90).

state. “The only choice Americans will have under my leadership is abortion”, he says; the devil insists that “we have to make sure these mass murders keep going”.<sup>30</sup> The film’s inclusion, when considered along with the other politically conservative films written, produced and directed by Del Vecchio,<sup>31</sup> contextualises *The Life Zone* as a film not only about abortion, but as a polemical counter-narrative about how abortion is framed within a strongly right-wing, conservative, Catholic discourse. Nonetheless, *The Life Zone* (misleadingly) frames itself as non-partisan and showing “both sides” by emphasising the benefits of a democratic political system through the presentation of staged vox pops, while focusing debates about abortion around a series of straw man arguments, such as whether it is possible to tell “when the foetus magically transforms into a human being” (a phrase that is repeated at length).

*The Life Zone*’s emphasis on captivity and abduction also draws from the framing narrative and grim, heavily colour-corrected colour palette of films from the torture-centric *Saw* franchise, in which people who have somehow transgressed are imprisoned in booby-trapped rooms and asked to prove their willingness to live a better life through acts of extreme suffering and endurance. In the original film (*Saw* (Wan US-AUS 2004)), a character is required to saw off his foot to free himself from a manacle. In later films the participants are required to do such things as allow parts of their bodies to be crushed, burned or maimed to liberate themselves from the antagonist Jigsaw’s elaborate Rube Goldberg-esque traps, which are often designed to ironically reflect the captives’ perceived crimes. In *The Life Zone*, the three women share dreams, such as one that juxtaposes images of abortion against images of insects, Nazism, genocide, and slavery, as well as people shouting “abort me” in various languages and mimicking the crying of babies. This has the peculiar effect of framing the women’s incarceration and enforced pregnancies as a type of torture – a contradictory tactic for a film that is inherently natalist. In this sense, not only are the pregnancies an act of suffering and penance, but so too is childbirth. This is made clear in the twist ending: despite an attempt to self-abort, the most adamantly pro-choice woman, Staci, gives birth to twins. She remains miserable and in a great deal of pain, in contrast to the beatific motherhood

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<sup>30</sup> United States Supreme Court concerns about the impropriety of Del Vecchio publicising *O.B.A.M. Nude* while he was employed as a municipal court judge led to Del Vecchio standing down from his position (Pérez-peña).

<sup>31</sup> See del Vecchio’s production company website, “Justice for All Productions: A Web Site Dedicated to the works of Kenneth Del Vecchio”

of the other two women, who have come to accept abortion as sinful and regret their actions. Suddenly, the two happy mothers disappear, Dr Wise informs Staci that she is somehow pregnant again, and the mysterious Jailer reveals himself to be Satan and the medical facility, hell. In a punishment fit for Tartarus, Staci will move through the cycle of pregnancy and childbirth for eternity. Dr Wise, who had been infertile<sup>32</sup> and killed herself when her husband left her to father children with another woman, will continue to deliver Staci's children, forcing them both to forever confront that which they did not appreciate in life and to account for their "terrible sins".<sup>33</sup>

In keen contrast to the conservative Catholic ideology of *The Life Zone* is an hour long standalone episode of the cable television horror anthology *Masters of Horror* titled "Pro-Life" (Carpenter US 2007), which uses the near-abortion of a monstrous child to highlight hypocrisy and violence in the anti-abortion movement.<sup>34</sup> The episode draws from the tropes of the religious horror films described earlier in this chapter: a young woman named Angelique has been mysteriously impregnated by some supernatural force, and in desperation she seeks an abortion at a nearby clinic. However, her deeply religious father, Dwayne, is a violent gun-wielding anti-abortion campaigner who is convinced that God has instructed him to personally ensure the baby remains safe, no matter what the human cost. During the "rescue", he and his sons lay siege to the "monsters" in the clinic in scenes that explicitly recall high-profile violent attacks against abortion providers, such as those committed by the American Christian terrorist anti-abortion organisation Army of God.<sup>35</sup> Angelique's pregnancy develops at a highly

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<sup>32</sup> It is telling that Dr Wise's infertility is framed as a personal flaw. See my discussion of essential motherhood – the idea that motherhood is an emotional and biological imperative – in chapter five of this thesis.

<sup>33</sup> There is no mention of what will happen to all these children.

<sup>34</sup> Another episode of *Masters of Horror* also dealt with abortion, although its content was considered to be problematic. "Imprint" (Miike US-JAP 2006), directed by prolific Japanese filmmaker Takashi Miike, featured rape, torture, murder, incest and a parasitic twin, but of particular concern was the frank representation of an abortion and repeated detailed images of aborted fetuses. Showtime, the premium cable and satellite television network that commissioned the series, deemed the episode to be too explicit to be screened, even though each of the episodes' directors were to be "given their choice of material and freedom from corporate censorship in exchange for creating their work on a tight budget and short schedule" (Kehr). Miike has responded, "As I was making the film I kept checking to make sure that I wasn't going over the line, but I evidently misestimated [sic] ... They decided it would be better to screen it without cuts at film festivals and release it on DVD" (Schilling). As such, it is the only episode of the series to have never screened in full in the United States (although it was broadcast in other territories), and its lack of inclusion is strongly indicative of the degree to which the depiction of abortion is considered taboo and offensive in American culture, even within a supposedly unregulated environment.

<sup>35</sup> See "Terrorist Organisation Profile: Army of God", and "National Abortion Federation: Clinic Violence: Army of God".

accelerated rate, and its demonic father, who is the one who has been speaking “God’s will” to Dwayne, rises from the earth and makes its way to Angelique. She gives birth, but where Rosemary accepts her role as the mother to a monster, Angelique promptly shoots her monstrous, arachnid offspring in the head, and the demon mournfully collects its body and returns to the abyss.

At the episode’s close, Angelique says “God’s will is done”, and the ironic pro-choice punch-line of “Pro-Life” is that the abortion, had it have been performed, would have been a way of saving lives. It is not that abortion, itself, was a violent act; rather Dwayne’s rabid evangelicalism and keen enthusiasm for brutality had made him an easy target for the demon’s manipulation. As such, “Pro-Life” marks abortion as a complicated and deeply personal issue that cannot be solved or wished away through violence or religious or political dogma. However, even though Angelique’s body was claimed by her father as his property, sexually assaulted by a supernatural creature and used as a vessel for a demonic child, she is shown to have a privileged knowledge of her body and she adamantly enforces her bodily sovereignty when she, firstly, goes to the clinic, and secondly, takes matters into her own hands and kills the newborn creature. Her right to choose is demonstrated to have been the difference between life and death.

“Pro-Life”, then, comes the closest of many of the films discussed so far to privileging the subject position of the pregnant woman, although it nonetheless frames the story in terms of the foetus as monstrous other. This offers a profoundly different message to the other films discussed here: the conservative *The Life Zone*, the gory exploitation films *Hanger* and *The Suckling*, *The Unborn*, which is addressed in more detail in the following chapter, and even *Inside*; in all these films, the foetus and the pregnant woman are pitted against each other in an antagonistic relationship, and as such the pregnant woman either must surrender her autonomy or be eliminated altogether. This restrictive paradigm clearly emphasises how difficult it is to consider pregnant subjectivity outside of strict binaries, even through a visual medium that is not subject to the same restrictions as the linguistic philosophical construction of the self *vis-à-vis* (an)other. However, I argue that this elimination becomes further complicated in films about reproductive technologies: where, in *Inside*, the female body is something that must be seen through (and, ultimately, torn apart) to get privileged access to the foetus, films that deal with reproductive technology are able to elide the woman

altogether. Horror films present a deep ambiguity, if not malaise, about the embodied nature of pregnancy and reproduction. So, in the next chapter, I further consider this elision by assessing the implications of what happens when reproduction is removed in part or entirely from the female reproductive body, before finally considering alternatives to the dominant construction of the pregnant subject.

## CHAPTER FOUR: NOT OF WOMAN BORN

### MAD SCIENCE, REPRODUCTIVE TECHNOLOGY AND THE ERASURE OF THE PREGNANT SUBJECT

*Whence, I often asked myself, did the principle of life proceed? It was a bold question, and one which has ever been considered as a mystery; yet with how many things are we upon the brink of becoming acquainted, if cowardice or carelessness did not restrain our inquiries.*

Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Frankenstein: or The modern Prometheus*  
(43-4)

*Clive: Why the fuck did you make her in the first place? Huh? For the betterment of mankind? You never wanted a normal child because you were afraid of losing control.*

*Splice* (Natali CAN-FR-US 2009)

In the previous chapter I considered how the dominant philosophical construction of the subject fails to account for the pregnant subject through a discussion of horror films that deal with pregnancy and abortion. In particular, I argued that in these films the pregnant subject is metaphorically erased, both through the narrative itself and through the films' imagery. In this chapter I continue this theme of subjectivity and absence through an analysis of horror films that deal with reproductive technologies and so-called 'mad science', which situate the act of conception and, sometimes, gestation itself outside of the woman's body. Here, I expand this line of argument by demonstrating how the visual and metaphorical allusions to the permeability or absence of the pregnant subject that are evident in films such as *Inside* (Bustillo and Maury FR 2007) are taken much further, so that the pregnant subject herself is physically or literally erased, sometimes entirely. I assert that such horror

films reflect the reality that biological reproduction is embedded within hegemonic constructions of gender and power, that is, within a framework of knowledge in which masculine scientific rationality attempts to control or dominate nature, which is itself feminised.

Reproductive technologies represent both a new frontier in biological science and an ethical quagmire. The possibility of the creation of biological life without and outside of the maternal body is a resonant and recurring trope within science fiction and horror, and one that can serve to abstract, displace or challenge the embodied subjectivity of the woman, often through the elision of her body. Reproductive technologies include contraception, prognostics and abortion, as well as assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs) such as the cryopreservation of sperm, oocytes (eggs) or fertilised embryos, as well as embryo transfer, artificial insemination, and cloning. They create a philosophical, discursive and physical space in which biology and technology intersect, especially in terms of their fictional representation. For instance, *in vitro* fertilisation (IVF) may be considered an ‘embodied’ technology, in that while conception itself occurs outside of the body, the process depends on the presence of a woman with a uterus to receive the embryos and gestate the foetus: eggs, from the woman herself or a donor, are fertilised by sperm within a fluid medium outside of the human body, and these fertilised eggs are implanted into the woman’s uterus. However, the filmic engagement with reproductive technology does not always rely on the presence of a body, which deals with the slippery, permeable boundary between self and other by framing the female, maternal self as expendable.

## SCIENCE AND MASCULINITY

Of integral importance to the discussion and representation of reproductive technology is the fact that, socially and culturally, science is framed in very gendered, often masculine terms. Certainly, technology has been represented as feminine; for example, the woman-shaped robot Maria in the silent science fiction epic *Metropolis* (Lang GER 1927) can be seen a figure whose femininity represents “technology’s simultaneous allure and powerful threat” (Springer 72). German literary and cultural scholar Andreas Huyssen suggests that Maria’s presentation as feminine draws from an

historic tendency among European writers in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries to code automata (mechanical humans) as female when they came to act dangerously:

Historically... as soon as the machine came to be perceived as a demonic, inexplicable threat and as harbinger of chaos and destruction - a view which typically characterizes many 19th-century reactions to the railroad to give but one major example - writers began to imagine the *Maschinenmensch* [machine-man] as woman. (226)

Rather than relying on a Freudian account of threatening female sexuality, Huyssen suggests, in consideration of the traditional correlation of nature with woman, that “Woman, nature, machine had become a mesh of significations which all had one thing in common: otherness” (226).<sup>1</sup>

More often though, there is a clear correlation of technology, hard science and activity with masculinity: as sociologist Alison Kelly bluntly asserts, “science is masculine” (133). For instance, in his discussion of masculinity and the history of marketing of children’s chemistry sets, medical historian Salim Al-Gailani notes that “manufacturers ... stressed the universal pedagogical value of their toys, which meant that parents were encouraged in advertisements to buy chemistry sets for both boys and girls” (378). However, despite this apparent egalitarianism, “historically contingent notions of masculinity and contemporary conventions in advertising were crucial not only to the portrayal of science in chemistry sets, but also determined how, and to whom, these toys were marketed” (378) – that is, to boys, whose images feature exclusively in such marketing material, and who are implied as the ideal user through the use of the terms “his”, “him” and “he” in the marketing copy. This reflects a broader trend in gendered representation; Weingart et al.’s 2003 study of the representation of science and scientists highlights the way that science is represented as a masculine pursuit. In their sample of 222 films only 18% of the scientist characters are female, and “More importantly, women scientists are younger and more attractive than their male counterparts, and they are lower on the career ladder” (283). This trend is also evident

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<sup>1</sup> This trajectory from dangerous, hard masculinity to even more dangerous femininity is apparent in the presentation of cyborgs in the science fiction action franchise *The Terminator* (Cameron UK-US 1984). The eponymous cyborg assassin of the original 1984 film is played by Arnold Schwarzenegger as heavily muscled and hyper-masculine, but later films successively streamline and feminise their cyborg antagonists. The villain in *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* (Cameron US-FR 1991) is a shapeshifter made of liquid metal, who provides a slick, digital foil to Schwarzenegger’s hulking, analogue cyborg. 2003’s *Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines* (Mostow US-GER-UK 2003) features a female shapeshifting terminator – a ‘terminatrix’ – and in the American television spin off, *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles* (2008-9), the terminator is an athletic teenage girl.



in Eva Flicker's 2008 sociological study "Women Scientists in Mainstream Film"; she suggests that while the go-to image of the film scientist is that of a male scientist, those female scientists who do exist are likely to be conventionally attractive, "unrealistically young" (252) and sexually available; if not, they are given a lab coat and glasses and relegated to the category of 'old maid'.

This masculinisation of science is part of a much longer intellectual tradition. Science historian and ecofeminist philosopher Carolyn Merchant attests that Francis Bacon, a "father of modern science", who is considered to be "the originator of the concept of the modern research institute, a philosopher of industrial science, the inspiration behind the Royal Society (1660), and ... the founder of the inductive method", helped shape an institution that, through the exploitation of nature, ultimately benefitted (and continues to benefit) the "middle class male entrepreneur" - the ideal subject - rather than women, "the lower orders of society" and nature itself (68). This naturalises science as a (masculine) act of domination: the exertion of control and order upon the natural world. Similarly, feminist philosopher Susan Bordo contends that Cartesian objectivism frames rational thought itself as inherently masculine, in the sense that 'masculine' suggests "a cognitive style, an epistemological stance. Its key term is *detachment*: from the emotional life, from the particularities of time and place, from personal quirks, prejudices, and interests, and most centrally, from the object itself" (451, emphasis original). This sense of detachment "is a defiant gesture of independence from the female cosmos" (452), and such "independence" infers a series of dichotomies: masculine / feminine; rational / irrational; subject / object; spiritual / corporeal (452); science / nature. Within this paradigm of objectivist science, "the formerly female earth becomes inert *res extensa*: dead, mechanically interacting matter." "She" becomes "it" - and "it" can be understood" (452). Bordo argues that "The project that fell to empirical science and "rationalism" was to tame the female universe" (454), and that it is "within this context that witch hunting and the male takeover of the processes of reproduction and birth, whatever their social and political causes, can be seen to have a profound psychocultural dimension as well" (455).

This masculine, scientific "takeover" of reproductive processes extends to other areas of women's reproductive health. For instance, while such technologies can have a "subversive potential", in that they make possible diverse family configurations (Davis-

Floyd and Dumit 7), the same technologies may be bound up within political hegemonic frameworks that look to regulate, rather than liberate, female sexual and reproductive autonomy. As feminist theorist Laura R. Woliver attests:

the hope of early feminist birth control movement activists was for simple contraceptives that would enhance women's autonomy. Instead, the field developed toward scientific expertise, medical control, and dissemination of birth control information and devices only through the discretion of predominantly male doctors. (15)

– a point that is acknowledged by Iris Young in her discussion of pregnancy, subjectivity and alienation. As I have indicated throughout this chapter, this emphasis on control and expertise serves to distance or even negate women's privileged and authoritative relationships with their bodies by recontextualising the reproductive body in terms of symptoms to be managed and dysfunctions to be cured. For instance, premenstrual bodily, behavioural and emotional changes are diagnostically framed as a 'disorder', even though "According to epidemiological research, 95 per cent of women experience at least mild symptoms premenstrually, 40 per cent experience moderate distress (PMS), and 11 – 13 per cent severe distress" (Ussher, *Managing the Monstrous Feminine* 26). This is acknowledged sarcastically in the film *Jennifer's Body* (Kusama US 2009), which I discuss in chapter two of this thesis: when Needy complains that Jennifer seems to be premenstrual, Jennifer replies, "PMS isn't real Needy, it was invented by the boy-run media to make us seem like we're crazy."

The gendered power relations exhibited within reproductive horror texts are heavily influenced by the way that the process of conception itself is culturally framed: as, allegedly, a politically and culturally neutral event that nonetheless reinforces dominant notions of sex, class and power. As Emily Martin argues in her article "The Egg and the Sperm", "the picture of egg and sperm drawn in popular as well as scientific accounts of reproductive biology relies on stereotypes central to our cultural definitions of male and female" (485); that is, biological processes are couched within very culturally determined gendered value systems. In the medical and social texts Martin analyses, the egg is framed as passive and inert, while the sperm are framed as streamlined and active; the egg is shrouded in regal and religious language, and considered to be fragile and delicate, while the sperm are discursively framed using militaristic language and are described as autonomous entities (490). As Martin notes, "it is remarkable how "femininely" the egg behaves, and how "masculinely" the sperm"

(489). These “[medical] texts have an almost dogged insistence on casting female processes in a negative light” (488), for they place emphasis on the male *production* of sperm and the *degeneration* of eggs within the woman’s ovaries, rather than the other way around. Oogenesis, the creation (or, differentiation) of the ovum, is framed as wasteful and sperm production is not, even though for a heterosexual couple who produce two or three children, the “wastage” of sperm outnumbers the “wastage” of eggs by 10 orders of magnitude (489). Further, while research has shown that both gametes are active participants in fertilisation – indeed, the egg is a far more aggressive participant than popularly presumed, and the sperm far less efficient at cellular penetration (492-3) – the description of active sperm and passive egg still remains the status quo, almost determinedly so.<sup>2</sup>

These gendered stereotypes within scientific literature are deeply socially embedded; for instance, gendered narratives about the ‘passive’ nature of the egg and the ‘active’ role of the sperm cells are proliferated through children’s picture books about human reproduction (Moore, “Billy”). In such books, which are designed to give children information about the “facts of life”, sexual intercourse that results in children is framed as an act of love occurring within a stable, heterosexual relationship, and fertilisation occurs within the woman’s body. The egg and the sperm are often anthropomorphised and endowed with gendered characteristics so that the egg is presented as a feminine entity and the sperm cells as masculine entities, for instance, by giving the egg rosy cheeks and eyes framed by long, feminine eyelashes. This presentation is largely uncritical and such a gendered representation is naturalised through the implicit assumption that the narratives presented in these books are objective fact. As medical sociologist Lisa Jean Moore argues in her 2003 article “Billy, the Sad Sperm with No Tail: Representations of Sperm in Children’s Books”, “Even though it is an interactive event that requires seemingly endless social negotiation and power transfer, human reproduction is simply assumed to be some innate biological drive that furthers progressive human evolution” (279). Within these books, which she refers to as “heterosexual manuals” (281), anthropomorphised “Sperm cells become performers acting out heterosexist fantasies / realities of patriarchal culture” (280). Further, the man and the woman are disembodied and decontextualised, for the egg-

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<sup>2</sup> See also Lisa Jean Moore’s 2009 analysis of masculinity and semen in “Killer Sperm: Masculinity and the Essence of Male Hierarchies”.

and sperm-subjects are often presented ‘outside’ of the uterus as independent entities, and the size of the sperm cells and the egg are roughly equivalent, even though the egg cell is significantly larger than the sperm cell<sup>3</sup>. This exclusion of people-as-agents creates a closed system in which egg and sperm are engaged in a seemingly neutral, objective biological event. As such, the “audience is asked to ... switch identification from the human producers to the sperm as the agent and the egg as the damsel” (290). This emphasis on activity *vis-à-vis* passivity takes a seemingly neutral and objective narrative about gender and naturalises its power imbalances.<sup>4</sup>

This power imbalance continues into popular cultural narrative. Within reproductive horror narratives – and, indeed, within the discourses surrounding reproductive technologies such as IVF – it is not just that the masculine is active and the feminine passive; rather, the female body is acted *upon*.<sup>5</sup> Emily Martin discusses one particular metaphor – that of a key and a lock – that is present in a description of the fertilisation process in an article in *Scientific American* (Paul M. Wassarman’s “Fertilization in Mammals”); she argues, “With the sperm designated as the “key” and the egg the “lock”, it is obvious which one acts and which is acted upon” (496). Such a metaphor also implies a release or an opening: the egg’s potential cannot be unlocked or released without the presence of the active sperm, even though the reverse is likewise true. In narratives about reproductive technologies, this mechanical metaphor is extended out to a macro level so that the woman’s body is the lock (and, perhaps, her fertility is a problem to be fixed or unlocked), and the often physically invasive science, and, by extension, the scientist, is the key that can do this. The woman’s body is a canvas, or an environment; it is something to be altered and controlled, as discussed in chapter two of this thesis, and its inherent ‘potential’ cannot be fulfilled without active intervention.

These mechanical metaphors are evident in discussions of IVF. Scholar Steven Mentor, writing about his and his wife’s experiences with IVF, remarks upon this sense that the woman’s body is there to be acted upon in a brutish, mechanical way. He discusses this cognitive dissonance in a tongue-in-cheek manner, remarking upon how,

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<sup>3</sup> The egg measures ~120µm in diameter, while the head of the sperm measures ~2.5µm across.

<sup>4</sup> This naturalisation is extremely evident in the way that the narrations in wildlife documentaries anthropomorphise the behaviour of the animals, often along normatively gendered lines. This is discussed further in chapter four of this thesis; see also Ganetz.

<sup>5</sup> See Raymond, particularly chapter two, for an extensive discussion of this imbalance.

during the procedure in which his wife's eggs are aspirated, he drolly perceives the fertility clinic as not a hospital, but a garage: "And my wife is the car and these [doctors] are the grease monkeys, down to the bad radio blaring and the power tools" (68). In this context, he perceives his wife's body as both "an organic, whole thing and as a car up on blocks" (68). This mechanisation of the female body and the reproductive system also lends itself to the objectivist paradigm discussed by both Bordo and Merchant: a woman's body or reproductive system may be 'broken' and fertility treatment such as IVF is used to 'fix' natural processes and conditions. As Mentor notes, popular accounts of IVF "often praise the doctors and the technology at the expense of women's bodies" (76), perhaps implying that science 'works' better than the body itself. Such an appraisal may also be extended to horror films, for in these films IVF and reproductive technologies in general are framed as hopeful, but with a caveat: the promise of technology is potentially celebrated, but the doctor's motivation, and the lengths to which they go, may not be. As Weingart et al. note, in popular film, scientists - even apparently benevolent ones - are portrayed with ambiguity.

### **'MAD SCIENCE' AND MEN MAKING LIFE**

This sense that the female body is acted on by a male agent of masculine science is exemplified in the image of the 'mad scientist' - a stock character, almost always male, who figures strongly in reproductive horror narratives. Importantly, the work of the mad scientist is carried out in secret, be it in a secret laboratory, a hidden basement, or a secluded town. As Weingart et al. conclude in their broad survey of 222 fiction films featuring scientists, this secrecy is informed by the "polarization of a public science in which the scientist works in the context of a community of peers, and a private science where the scientist has chosen to leave the community or was excommunicated by it because he or she transgressed the boundaries into forbidden research territory" (285). This emphasis upon privacy lends the mad scientist a Faustian cast, in that he is willing to transgress ethical boundaries in the pursuit of knowledge or power. Just as different incarnations of the Faust story emphasised different character flaws or motivations (Toumey 417-8), so too are mad scientists driven by a variety of impulses, such as ambition (*Jurassic Park*, (Spielberg US 1993)), misogyny (*The Stepford Wives* (Forbes US

1975)), vengeance (*The Abominable Dr Phibes* (Fuest UK-US 1971)), and morbid curiosity (*Re-Animator* (Gordon US 1985)). There is a degree of ambivalence in mad science narratives, for they evoke a tension between liberation and domination, and creation and destruction (Weingart et al. 280). This ambivalence carries over into reproductive horror narratives, for in this case the mad scientist figure takes on the villainous role of aggressor, colonising the female body, while simultaneously standing as a warning against science 'run amok'.

Mad science narratives in reproductive horror often ask: how can life be created and brought forth without woman? How can man make life? Films such as *Frankenstein* (Whale US 1931), *Bride of Frankenstein* (Whale US 1933), *The Island of Dr Moreau* (Taylor US 1977), *Metropolis*, *The Stepford Wives*, *Edward Scissorhands* (Burton US 1990), *The Boys from Brazil* (Schaffner UK-US 1978), *Dead Ringers* (Croeneberg CAN-US 1988) and *Alien: Resurrection* (Jeunet US 1997) feature scientists who in some way have, or have tried to, create or augment life, and in doing so displace, replace or alter the woman's body or womb. In her 2005 book *Phallic Panic*, Barbara Creed notes that, in these films, both the creator and the created are monstrous, for "when man attempts to create life without woman ... he both becomes a monster and brings forth monsters" (xvi). However, "in his attempt to appropriate the power of woman he almost always fails" (41): Dr Frankenstein's monsters, Dr Moreau's half-animal half-human creatures, and Ripley as hybrid Alien in *Alien: Resurrection*, which is discussed in chapter five of this thesis, all compare the monstrosity of the scientific creations to the inhumanity of their creators. In the case of David Cronenberg's 1986 remake of *The Fly* the creator is the created: scientist Seth Brundle has his DNA scrambled with that of a housefly during a teleportation experiment. His visceral, corporeal and ultimately doomed evolution into 'Brundlefly', through the emergence of insect traits and the sloughing of human body parts, is framed as an act of rebirth. However, in contrast to pregnancy and birth narratives featuring women and despite the messy fragmentation and reconfiguration of his body, there is never any sense that Brundle's subjectivity and role as the film's protagonist (and antagonist) is in doubt; rather, he is altered and augmented, not erased.<sup>6</sup> A more subtle 'rebirth' happens in *Godsend* (Hamm US-CAN 2004): a couple

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<sup>6</sup> This is not to suggest that reading Brundle-as-subject in this way is unproblematic. For instance, from the perspective of Human-Animal Studies this 'dehumanisation' can be read instead as a productive metamorphosis, so that human-Brundle embraces, rather than acquiesces to, the insect nature of the fly;

whose son, Adam, had died on his 8<sup>th</sup> birthday are convinced by a geneticist to have Adam cloned and his mother implanted with the egg. However, when this second Adam turns eight, he is haunted by strange dreams of a disturbed boy called Zachary and his behaviour becomes violent. The geneticist had included DNA from his own dead son, set to 'switch' when Adam passed his 8<sup>th</sup> birthday, thus using Adam's mother as an incubator to help him reclaim his own child. These films, *en masse*, act as cautionary tales against scientific hubris, and the result is almost inevitably that the scientist is somehow destroyed.

The prototypical cinematic image of the mad scientist can be found in James Whale's seminal 1931 film *Frankenstein*. The film opens with an announcer stating that Dr Frankenstein was "a man of science who sought to create a man after his own image without reckoning upon God", a statement that immediately posits the scientist as a person who will break all moral and ethical codes in the interests of discovery. Frankenstein has been experimenting with reanimating dead animals and a human heart, and has finally pieced together a man using parts taken from corpses. Frankenstein brings the creature to life during a lightning storm by channelling electricity, a literal spark of life, through electrodes in the creature's neck, and he is overcome with mania as he cries "it's alive – it's alive!" In a moment that was originally cut from the film because of its blasphemousness (but that was restored in 1999), one of the experiment's observers remarks "in the name of God!" to which Frankenstein arrogantly replies, "in the name of God? Now I know what it feels like to be God!" Here, the film explicitly frames Frankenstein's actions as heresy: he has subverted the natural order in the name of science, and in doing so, he has shown science itself to be amoral. Dr Frankenstein's act of hubris is in creating life outside of an embodied male-female sexual coupling - an act that is grimly humorous when one considers his disinterest towards his fiancée. The assumption is not only that science is unnatural, but that the creation of life is something sacrosanct; the Christian God may create life in His own image, but man (or, masculine science) may not interfere with or mimic such processes. This image of the arrogant, anarchic scientist, doing whatever he can to advance his

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Brundlefly warns his love interest, Ronnie, that insects "don't have politics" and don't understand compassion or compromise, for they are a human construct. Rather, I suggest that reading *The Fly* as a narrative of science and reproduction firstly indicates that Brundle's scientific hubris and human amorality predates this insect amorality, and secondly privileges his subjectivity. Anna Powell also provides a Deleuzoguattarian reading of Brundle's transformation in *Deleuze and Horror Film* (62, 79-80).

interests – both personal and scientific – is a resonant one, and the trope of the mad scientist is deeply indebted to Whale's film.

## FEAR OF SCIENCE

Despite the ubiquity of the image of the Frankenstein-inspired mad scientist, Christopher P. Toumey, in "The Moral Character of Mad Scientists: A Cultural Critique of Science", argues that stories in which science and scientists are presented as evil are inherently antirational. He indicates that this is in part because secular, clinical science comes to be pitted antagonistically against the strictures of a Judeo-Christian moral framework in such a way that science and the search for knowledge itself is classed as dangerous and morally transgressive. He argues that "mad scientist stories mine the raw material of these anxieties and then shape them into moral narratives that purport to explain whence comes evil in the guise of science and how to repel it" (411). Similarly, pop culture historian David J. Skal notes, "the mad scientist has served as a lightning rod for otherwise unbearable anxieties about the meaning of scientific thinking and the uses and consequences of modern technology" (18). Toumey's core argument – that science fiction stories are inherently progressive, while mad science stories aren't – is extremely reductionist, not least because it presupposes a thematic and political heterogeneity within science fiction that doesn't exist. However, the notion that mad science stories act as cautionary tales, and that these tales are inherently bound up with an implied moral and ethical code, is salient.

This tension between science and religious moral frameworks is made bluntly obvious in *Blessed* (Fellows UK-ROM 2004), which frames reproductive science as quite literally unholy. The film, like so many of the films discussed in this chapter, draws explicitly from the story of *Rosemary's Baby*, in that it features a young woman who is impregnated by the devil while her initially loving and supportive husband is tempted by an offer of fame and success. In this instance, the impregnation happens through IVF. As in *Godsend*, the infertile young couple - Samantha and Craig - are referred by their doctor to a new clinic in a remote small town, a place that juxtaposes cutting-edge science with solitude and natural beauty. The clinic itself is owned by a Satanist business mogul who offers Craig a lucrative book deal, and it is also home to an



experimental cloning facility. Samantha's eggs and Craig's sperm are collected, and the sperm sample is secretly augmented with a red, blood-like substance stored in an ancient vial – Satanic DNA. The “mad science” in this film appears profoundly rational – it is suggested that the scientific staff and many of the town's inhabitants belong to the Dawn of the New Light Church, a devil-worshipping sect that is trying to bring about a new apocalypse. In *Blessed*, the acceptance of IVF treatment – that is, the acceptance of an ‘unnatural’ form of conception - is literally a pact with the devil, an attitude that is rearticulated by a rogue priest who attempts to get Samantha to poison her unborn children. In this film, rather than focussing on the actions of one specific mad scientist, cutting-edge science itself is being utilised by forces of evil as a tool with which to achieve their goals. Further still, science is shown to have progressed to this level explicitly because of its association with evil, for without the wealth and focus of its Satanist benefactor Earl Sydney, and the support and actions of the Church's social and technological networks, such high-end fertility treatment would not be available at all.<sup>7</sup>

The notion that this sort of science is ‘mad’ relates to anxieties surrounding the question of what it is to be human, or natural, and how and why science might augment or alter the natural. Indeed, the tension and the possible distinction between the natural and the monstrous drives many reproductive horrors. Reproductive and genetic sciences make possible the manipulation of the genetic makeup of cells that may make up an embryo or a foetus, with the intention of eliminating pathology, although the distinction between what is genetically normal and genetically desirable is fluid and fraught with difficulty. Such practices may be clearly linked with eugenics, which is described by eugenics pioneer Sir Francis Galton in 1904 as “the science which deals with all influences that improve the inborn qualities of a race; also with those that develop them to the utmost advantage” (1). However, the term eugenics is now popularly and irrevocably attached to the actions and experiments of Nazi SS officer and physician Josef Mengele, whose interest in heredity led to horrific experimentation upon concentration camp prisoners, including newborns, infants and young twins, during World War II.

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<sup>7</sup> It is worth noting that the film itself doesn't advance a particular religious position, only that like the ‘apocalyptic’ films discussed in the previous chapter it draws from the iconography of pop-Catholicism.

Understandably, given this negative association, eugenics remains something of a *bête noire* in reproductive narratives. The science fiction film *GATTACA* (Niccol US 1997) certainly draws upon the association of eugenics with fascism through its use of a soft, 1930s-inspired modernist, retro-futuristic aesthetic design and colour palette, and a storyline about the artificial selection of those who are genetically ‘superior’ – the “masculine desire of governing the hierarchies of a genetically determinist world” (Stacey, *The Cinematic Life of the Gene* 124). As such, reproductive technology narratives engage clearly with fears surrounding eugenic practices. Reproductive practices and technologies such as pre-natal screening for disease or disability, or genetic counselling, in which prospective parents are advised of the probability of transmitting a chromosomal or other inherited disorder to their child, are useful for prospective parents who wish to minimise “risk” (see Lupton, “Risk and the Ontology of Pregnant Embodiment”). However, they are also highly contentious, for anything that is selected against is, implicitly, something that is selected for; such selection may be deleterious, threatening or ethically or religiously problematic, such as in the case of selective abortion of severely disabled fetuses. The negative connotations surrounding eugenic practices have also informed popular debate about the implications of IVF and embryo science, in which the interference with or augmentation of genetic or embryonic material may be seen as a so-called ‘slippery slope’ to other more invasive, Darwinistic practices.

Early efforts in human embryonic research were framed as threatening or unethical. Robert G. Edwards, the physiologist who, with surgeon Patrick Steptoe, pioneered human *in vitro* fertilisation, recalls:

Ethicists decried us, forecasting abnormal babies, misleading the infertile and misrepresenting our work as really acquiring human embryos for research. They announced that IVF did not cure infertility, as women remained infertile after having an IVF baby. My response was to put forward spectacles, false teeth and heart transplants. (1092)

Such a comment frames IVF as a temporary augmentation, a workaround for a broken system. However, the notion that the human body itself needs fixing permanently is nonetheless present. Edwards indicates the impulse to *correct* reproduction:

“Something must be fundamentally flawed with a reproductive system that allows only 20% of embryos to implant, even in younger couples” (1094). Such a comment highlights the fact that the natural is extremely fallible and not always particularly

efficient, but also the notion that science can (and, perhaps, will) mend or enhance the natural, even when outside observers see such tinkering as immoral or dangerous.

The notion of “mad science” is extremely potent in debates surrounding embryo research. As sociologist of science Michael Mulkay outlines, works of popular science fiction (and, by inference, horror and other mass entertainment products) are drawn upon by laypeople as they engage in debates over new technologies. Mulkay suggests that “outsiders” – that is, non-scientists – look to fantastic texts to help them consider the future impact of new technologies, particularly if those technologies are allowed to develop and proliferate without adequate moral and ethical checks and balances, whatever they may be. In imagining new technological futures, people “must either invent a new, plausible story line or fit developments into a narrative structure that is already available” (158). In the case of embryo research and new reproductive technologies, the anti-science image of the mad scientist – particularly Dr Frankenstein and his “dream of systematic, science-based control over the creation of human beings” (157) – looms large in the popular consciousness. Mulkay outlines how the Frankenstein myth is deployed in two particular ways. First, the explicit framing of NRT as “Frankenstein science” in some newspapers (160-1) – complete with unrelated movie stills - implies that scientists are dangerous and that during their embryo research they will act in a transgressive manner unless specific legislation is enacted to stop them. Secondly, the Frankenstein myth is invoked even when it has little bearing upon the science being discussed. Mulkay looks to parliamentary debates about embryo science in the UK between 1984 and 1988, and indicates that the term “Frankenstein” is deployed loosely in less specific scientific contexts as a way for the speaker to signal their “disapproval or repugnance” (166). As such, the invocation of mad science is less about the scientific specifics and more about the individual’s “imaginative reconstruction” of the scientific process and their disapproval of what they consider to be the inevitable future excesses of scientists.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Mulkay also identifies similar references to Aldous Huxley’s dystopian 1932 novel *Brave New World*, in which the population, which is grown from embryos in ‘hatcheries’, exists in a strict caste system and is controlled through conditioning, drugs and reproductive technology.

**THE UNBORN: MAD SCIENTISTS AND MADWOMEN**

All these concerns – the subjectivity of the mother, the ethical quandaries raised through the application of reproductive science, and the image of the male mad scientist – are evident in *The Unborn* (Flender US 1991). In the film, Virginia and her husband Brad are desperate to have a child. They have been told by previous doctors that their chances of conceiving naturally or through IVF are extremely poor, so on the recommendation of an acquaintance they approach Dr Meyerling, whose success rate with infertile couples is said to be “close to 100%”. However, Dr Meyerling has been



**Fig. 4.1 Mad science:** Virginia regards one of the many luminous orbs that are housing Dr Meyerling’s super-foetuses, before shooting at them and destroying the facility. The presentation of the foetuses explicitly recalls Lennart Nilsson’s iconic foetal photography (*The Unborn*).

secretly manipulating the genes in the sperm samples so as to create “better babies”, and the effects of pregnancy upon many of the women involved have been fatal. While the babies show extreme strength and tenacity, some of the pregnant women have displayed psychotic or violent tendencies, and one woman appears to be eaten alive from the inside out by her foetus. The results of such experimentation are also dreadful; for instance, one of the born children, now a toddler, drowns her intellectually disabled older brother and exhibits signs of extraordinary intelligence. Once Virginia understands the nature of the experiments, and that her husband (as in *Rosemary’s Baby*) agreed to her participation without her consent, she has a back alley abortion and confronts Dr Meyerling. He informs her that mothers are no longer needed; instead, he is growing foetuses in his lab in large orb shaped containers, again deliberately invoking Lennart Nilsson’s foetal imagery. Virginia destroys his work by shooting the luminous orbs (fig. 4.1), but goes back to the dumpster where the abortionist disposed of her foetus, as discussed earlier, only to find that its unnatural strength helped it survive the procedure. She keeps the malformed child, although it is not stated if she plans to raise it or kill it.

Here, reproductive science is presented as unfathomable to the layperson, which – for better or worse – imparts a sense of scientific authority. When the science behind IVF and Dr Meyerling’s experiments is discussed, it is in the vaguest of terms. Virginia confronts Brad about his complicity in Dr Meyerling’s experiments, and Brad responds, “he modified the sperm - something about protein synthesis - making the baby stronger, more viable in the womb”. Brad’s lack of understanding about Dr Meyerling’s process is reckless, for while the outcome of the experiments is clear, the methodology is not. However, his flippancy is also indicative of the power imbalance between doctor and patient, and the level of trust that is implicitly assumed as a part of that relationship. Brad is comforted by the jargon – “something about protein synthesis” – yet has no actual understanding of the process. Instead, scientific details are replaced by images of a more documentarian nature. When Dr Meyerling looks at Brad’s sperm sample with his microscope, we are shown what is implied to be a scientific, “doctor’s eye” view of the sample – an image of motile sperm. Likewise, when Virginia has an egg aspirated, fertilised and re-implanted, we are given a microscopic view of the egg (fig. 4.2). The disembodied images of the sperm and the egg are ineffable – to the layperson, it is



**Fig. 4.2 A privileged vantage point:** (left to right) A high angle shot of Virginia being anaesthetised is followed by a low angle shot that emphasises the power the doctors have over her. We see the needle penetrate her stomach and the egg is aspirated and mixed with a white fluid. We are shown the newly fertilised egg itself, wriggling around, before returning to a shot of Virginia post-operation (*The Unborn*).

impossible to tell whether or not these raw, organic materials are “natural” or “augmented”, and this uncertainty creates a sense of anxiety. They also reinforce the privileged position of the doctor, for he can see further and deeper than the couple.

Here, reproductive science is presented as sinister and dangerously unregulated. Dr Meyerling discusses the promise of reproductive technologies with enthusiasm, gushing that the “technology of in vitro pregnancy [sic] has progressed so rapidly that today almost anything is possible!” However, the “anything” that entices Brad and Virginia is not the “anything” that Dr Meyerling has in mind, and the explicit mention of

the technology's rapid development indicates that this development may have been imprudent. It is stated that Dr Meyerling had been working on the Human Genome Project, which started formally in 1990, making it a contemporaneous touchstone of technological anxiety. The implication, then, is that the work being undertaken by geneticists is both cutting edge and dangerous, and that without a satisfactory degree of caution – or, perhaps, oversight – the science and the scientists may 'run amok'. The scene in which Virginia is implanted exacerbates this sense of dis-ease. As the doctor prepares for the procedure, low camera angles make the medical staff appear to loom over her, and the soundtrack features a synthesiser mimicking the sound of a heart beat. When Virginia is anaesthetised, a high camera angle makes her prone body look extremely vulnerable. A camera lingers tightly on her exposed stomach as the aspiration needle penetrates her body and draws back blood. The footage of the egg, as it exists within, yet apart from, the body then distances us from Virginia-as-subject – for, as Elizabeth Ettore notes, "through [the] biomedical gaze, bodies are treated as 'things' to be studied and not as embodied subjects" (5).

Reproductive science and masculinity are also explicitly linked. In some ways, this frames the biomedical with the rational, for instance, Virginia's opinion about her body and her pregnancy is often discounted or belittled. Even though Virginia is shown to be intelligent and successful in her own right – she is an acclaimed children's author – during the couple's initial consultation, Dr Meyerling speaks exclusively to Brad, until Brad leaves the room to provide a sperm sample. As the film progresses, in another nod to *Rosemary's Baby*, Virginia is accused of being irrational and unstable. Her previous episodes of depression, and her family's history of mental illness, are used by others as a justification for her instability. When Virginia discovers that Brad was complicit in Dr Meyerling's plan to augment the sperm sample, Brad states that his duplicity was because he didn't feel that she was "ready" – a clear inference that he felt Virginia wasn't capable of making sound, rational decisions about her own body.

This association of masculinity, rationality and science is most clear in the representation of alternative (that is, non-scientific), female-centric health practises. During her first visit to Dr Meyerling's clinic, Virginia meets a gay woman, Connie, who is there in support of her partner's pregnancy, and the couple invite Virginia to a women-only antenatal class. The class – a 'new age' Lamaze session – is presented in a

comical and derisory fashion that draws on negative and dismissive stereotypes of lesbians and feminists. The gay couple imply that they are offering their classes as a female-friendly alternative to the masculinist, scientific mainstream: they advocate holistic and homeopathic approaches, they discuss sharing recipes for human placenta, and they encourage the women in the class to steer clear of using what they call “male imaging” when picturing their pregnancies and impending labour. When a woman asks about when her husband can start attending, they say that they consider men to be “outsiders” who get in the way of a woman’s communication with her unborn child, a statement that marks them as extreme in their position as Dr Meyerling himself. Beth, a hard-nosed journalist who is attending the antenatal class and who befriends Virginia, criticises the group’s practices. She asserts that Dr Meyerling doesn’t approve of the gay couple because they are not “accredited” – that is, they are not recognised as authorities within a patriarchal, technocratic system.<sup>9</sup> When Connie comments “I wish you weren’t so afraid to embrace your own gender”, Beth’s reply is sharp, misogynistic and dismissive: “suck a dick”. Two ironies are left unstated. Firstly, even though their class is an act of resistance, the lesbian couple are still reliant on modern science to have a child. Secondly, the lesbian couple’s distrust of the masculine nature of the scientific treatment comes to be well-founded. Nonetheless, their emphasis on the “natural” and “alternative” is still presented as an inferior alternative to the “rational” and scientific.

While the film presents IVF and genetic modification as technologies that can offer infertile couples hope, it acts as a cautionary tale about what can happen when cutting-edge technology isn’t subject to proper oversight and scrutiny – although who ‘should’ provide this oversight is often left unstated. However, the genetic technology in the film has progressed as far as it has – for good or ill – *because* there has been no oversight. Dr Meyerling’s scientific goals are explicitly eugenic, and his ability to operate without interruption has given him freedom to create a technology that ostensibly helps couples who have exhausted their other options. However, helping patients is a side effect of Dr Meyerling’s core research, which is to add chromosomes to the children’s genetic code so as to make “better babies” – children that are strong and hyper-intelligent, even if it results in the death of the mothers and others around them. He sees this as a step along an evolutionary pathway and offhandedly provides a vague motive:

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<sup>9</sup> See chapter five’s discussion of the film *Grace* (Solet US-CAN 2009) for a more in depth consideration of competing discourses in antenatal and maternity care.



humans have damaged the world and these children might provide a way forward. However, he looks at the mothers as collateral damage, apologising for the pain and trauma that he has caused Virginia, but deeming it a necessary sacrifice. Beth's earlier warnings to Virginia are resonant: Beth identified Dr Meyerling as a *researcher*, not a doctor, with the implication that while a 'doctor' may have a duty of care towards his patients, a 'researcher' who is acting only in the pursuit of knowledge does not, and will happily breach ethical considerations in order to advance 'his' studies.

That said, *The Unborn* displays some ambivalence towards reproductive technology, so that science and its potential for positive change isn't demonised altogether. Prior to Virginia's experiences under Dr Meyerling's care, she and Brad discuss the potential for genetic manipulation and screening. Their conversation explicitly invokes some of the debates surrounding eugenics, genetic screening and "designer" babies, for, as Weingart et al. indicate, "Contrary to the expectations of the critics of eugenics, there is a demand for these techniques in a society characterized by individualism and the drive for self-realization" (281). Virginia says that that she couldn't deal with a child like their friends' son Bobby, who is described as "mentally retarded", or "one with half a heart". When she brings up the issue of heredity and her family history of mental illness, Brad responds, "You get depressed once in a while. Big deal. It doesn't make you some sort of genetic deficient." Their conversation alludes to the potential benefits of genetic screening, but Brad's use of the term "genetic deficient" certainly infers a form of genetic hierarchy. He implies a distinction between Virginia's depression and Bobby's intellectual disability, but the bounds of that distinction are not articulated further. The inclusion of this conversation, as later compared to Dr Meyerling's megalomaniacal posturing, offers up a sense of ethical uncertainty while also suggesting that there is cause to alter or eliminate that which is "deficient".

## **FEMALE MAD SCIENTISTS AND *SPLICE***

As noted, the cinematic mad scientist is usually male: he "does" masculine science, which challenges or alters (feminised) nature or the female body. Nonetheless, there are some female mad scientists: many feature in camp, low budget horror comedy films such as *Abbott & Costello Meet Frankenstein* (Barton US 1948), *Blood of Dracula*

(Strock US 1957), *Jesse James meets Frankenstein's Daughter* (Beaudine US 1966) and *Flesh Feast* (Grinter US 1970). These characters are played for comic value and sex appeal; for instance, Dr Myra in *Teenage Zombies* (Warren US 1961) sports a faux Eastern European accent and wears heavy make-up and an evening gown, which she occasionally covers with a white lab coat (fig. 4.3). The character of Dr Susan McAlester in the 1999 monster movie *Deep Blue Sea* (Harlin US-AUS 1999) harkens back to these earlier women, both in terms of her ambition – in this case, to create super-intelligent sharks in the hope of finding a cure for the Alzheimer's disease that is affecting her father, even if it means contravening international codes of ethics – and her presentation: there are extended scenes in which she is wearing little more than her underwear, and one of the film's theatrical release posters features her in the water, wearing a wetsuit, but with her cleavage exposed (fig 4.4).<sup>10</sup> These representations are less about the science itself, and rely more on the juxtaposition of an attractive, sexualised woman performing “masculine” science<sup>11</sup>. As such, they are defined as much by normative, if not misogynistic representations of gender as they are by their profession.

One recent example stands out: the 2009 Canadian science fiction horror film *Splice* considers how reproductive horror and mad science can be articulated in terms of maternity and femininity, and at its conclusion it offers a meditation on the embodied nature of pregnancy and reproduction. *Splice* offers an interesting companion to the films discussed in this chapter as the mad scientists are a heterosexual couple: brilliant geneticists Clive and Elsa<sup>12</sup> are experimenting with the splicing together of DNA from various animals for a pharmaceutical company that wishes to use the hybrids to develop new drugs. The most successful ‘specimen’, which they name Dren, is a human-animal hybrid, bred clandestinely by Elsa from her own DNA. After Dren's ‘birth’ Clive expresses deep reservations, but Elsa becomes increasingly obsessed with the project.

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<sup>10</sup> An unusually positive scientist – not quite mad, but certainly transgressive and a little odd – is Rosetta Stone, who creates three digital clones of herself in the unusual and gentle science fiction romance *Teknolust* (Hershman-Leeson US-GER-UK 2002). This film ends positively for Rosetta is lovingly framed as both mother and sister, and each of her clones comes to experience the world in their own way and find connection outside of their digital confines. (See Stacey, *The cinematic Life of the Gene* 195-224 for a detailed reading of the film).

<sup>11</sup> See Eva Flicker's sociological study of images of female scientists for a more detailed discussion of this.

<sup>12</sup> The characters are named for actors Colin Clive (Dr Frankenstein in James Whale's *Frankenstein* and *Bride of Frankenstein*) and Elsa Lanchester (Mary Shelley and the monster's ‘bride’ in *Bride of Frankenstein*).



**Fig. 4.3 Sexy female mad scientist c.1961:** Well-coiffed female mad scientist Dr Myra, who is of indeterminate Eastern European origin, spends the film wearing an evening gown, which she occasionally covers with a white lab coat (*Teenage Zombies*).



**Fig. 4.4 Sexy female mad scientist c. 1999:** Dr Susan McAlester exposes her cleavage in the theatrical release poster for *Deep Blue Sea*.

At the same time, as Dren rapidly grows from child to adolescent she moves away from cute, playful femininity and begins to demonstrate the hallmarks of overt, almost aggressive female sexuality – something that Elsa chooses to ignore. Finally, Clive is seduced by the hybrid in a scene coloured by both infidelity and incestuous intent, but they are interrupted mid-coitus by Elsa; this blunt reference to Freud's 'primal scene' is influenced by an earlier scene in which Dren spies on Elsa and Clive's lovemaking. Dren starts to jealously turn on her 'mother', but because of their escalating arguments Clive and Elsa fail to recognise that one of their previous, non-human hybrid specimens has spontaneously changed sex. The couple decide to "terminate the experiment" by killing Dren, but Dren too changes sexes: male Dren is larger, more violent and aggressive, and is now explicitly predatory. He hunts down Elsa, mirrors his sexual relationship with Clive by violently raping her, then kills Clive before Elsa is able to finally shove in his skull with a rock in an act of filicide. In the film's final scene, Elsa is seen in a meeting with her pharmaceutical company employers talking about the value of the chemical compounds found in Dren. Elsa has been paid a significant amount of money to assure her silence regarding the disastrous series of events and for taking the experiment to the "next stage"; as she leaves it is revealed that she is heavily pregnant to Dren. Elsa remarks "what's the worst that could happen?"

The mad science films discussed in this chapter display a fascination with the creation of life outside of the maternal body. Importantly, they challenge the mother-father dyad by either eliminating the need for one or both of the parents, or by introducing other individuals, such as geneticists, into the acts of conception and gestation. However, *Splice* reframes reproductive technology as family drama: here Dren is very clearly framed as a child stand-in for Clive and Elsa and the quasi-parental pair celebrate the creature's 'birth' as their greatest success. Dren's role as 'child', instead of science project, soon becomes complicated. Elsa forms a strong motherly bond with the creature, dressing her in feminine children's clothes and jealously lording her relationship with Dren over Clive, who considers Dren to be a specimen to be contained. Their later arguments over Dren, and Clive's growing dis-ease, explicitly frame the couple as bickering parents who cannot agree upon the proper way to raise their child. Clive's discovery that Dren was created with Elsa's DNA is the inverse of a discovery that one's child was actually fathered by another man. Later arguments, and

Clive's sexual encounter with Dren, reframe the relationship as dysfunctional and on the brink of collapse. Elsa and Clive's relationship over the course of the film is an accelerated version of familial bonding and disintegration, mirroring Dren's accelerated childhood, puberty and adolescence. Clive accuses Elsa of propagating the experiment because she is too frightened of having a 'real' child, and that creating a child in an experimental setting (allegedly) allows her a greater sense of control. Clearly, this backfires on Elsa – her unruly 'experimental' child becomes an obsession, then rapes her and kills her husband.

At the film's conclusion, the revelation that Elsa is pregnant is horrific in two ways. Her initial transgression – over and above the taboo of experimenting with human genetic material – is that she secretly uses her own DNA rather than that of an anonymous donor, and then tries to raise the creature like her own child. This circumvents the need for pregnancy and birth and also ensures that Elsa, as subject, is autonomous and intact – until she is violently raped by Dren. However, I suggest that Elsa's second transgression is that she has chosen to keep her new, unborn child, which was conceived in an act that was equal parts incestuous and bestial, due to Dren's status as an animal hybrid, as a continuation of her experiment. Although the pharmaceutical company she works for is complicit in the continuation of the experiment, Elsa's incessant desire for knowledge and creation is coupled with a desire to somehow bear the child she has, perhaps, been denied, through the death of her partner and the death of her first 'creation' – but only within the context of a 'controlled' experiment. Elsa's pregnancy also alludes to parthenogenesis, as she is both mother and father to the offspring which perhaps posits her as animal as her offspring. Given her disinterest in wanting to have a 'real' baby with Clive, this is a final act of hubris, not eliminating the woman's role in reproduction, as with *Frankenstein* or *The Island of Dr Moreau*, but wilfully removing the need for a man. Elsa's relationship with her body plays upon the split between self and other that is so prevalent in gynae horror films – she is pregnant because of something that was done to her, and by treating her pregnancy as another experiment she is explicitly distancing her physical, fleshy self from her intellectual, scientist persona. However, pregnant Elsa looks wan and sickly; where Iris Marion Young, in "Pregnant Embodiment", contrasts her (feminine) corporeality with her (masculine) academic goals as a philosopher, the film suggesting that no matter how

hard Elsa tries to disavow or reframe her pregnancy, she cannot escape or transcend her embodied (animal) state. I argue that this ending likewise shifts reproductive horror back into its 'rightful' place: Elsa shares her body with another, so that her body is now her laboratory, and her punishment for having used science to create life outside the body is to be a vessel and bear the next monster herself.

## **BRAVE NEW WORLDS? CYBORG FUTURES AND PREGNANT SUBJECTIVITY**

At the opening of the previous chapter, I considered philosophical engagements with pregnant subjectivity, through Iris Marion Young and Imogen Tyler's semi-autobiographical accounts and through Christine Battersby's call for an embodied subjectivity that acknowledges that we are all born subjects and that takes as 'normal' the woman's body, with its implied capacity for pregnancy and elasticity. The horror film is overtly concerned with probing the physical and philosophical limits of the body and the self, and as such I find it remarkable that so few films offer an alternative way of charting subjectivity. Rather, the films discussed in this chapter and the chapter prior indicate an extraordinary dis-ease about the permeability of the boundary between self and other, and for the most part treat any ontological uncertainty as a site of horror and anxiety. As such, these films work hard to individuate the pregnant woman and the foetus, either by distancing or eliminating the pregnant subject, or by positing either the foetus or the woman herself as a monstrous other. So, to close, I ask what other theories of the body and the self might help overcome this anxiety over subjectivity and the 'indivisible' self, particularly with regards to reproductive technology.

The intersection of technology and the organic is central to Donna Haraway's seminal 1985 article "A Cyborg Manifesto", which offers one way of leaving behind this restrictive division between self and other while simultaneously celebrating the expansion or the augmentation of the concept of the subject. She defines a cyborg as "a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction" (*Simians* 149). Haraway's cyborg is a progressive figure that invokes a utopian socialist-feminist philosophy to challenge the notion of submission and domination that is found within 'mainstream' feminist and Marxist engagements with science and technology. It looks to new and interesting combinations

of the biological and the technological, and considers the way that these combinations and alliances could offer openness and new possibilities rather than restriction.

Haraway positions the cyborg as something we all are – “chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism” (*Simians* 150) – so that the figure of the cyborg is as much an ontological position as it is a metaphor and a literal description of the human body within technology-saturated, late-capitalist culture. Excitement and tension occurs where the distinction between dualities such as organism and machine intersect: “the relation between organism and machine has been a border war. The stakes in the border war have been the territories of production, reproduction, and imagination” (*Simians* 150).

Clearly, this is a tension that is at the fore in philosophical accounts of pregnant subjectivity, but instead of treating this border as a site of fear or disavowal, Haraway advocates for the pleasure that can be found in boundary confusion. This argument is expanded in Claudia Springer’s article “The Pleasure of the Interface”, which considers how the image of the cyborg is a new incarnation of the fascination and disgust that is associated with the limits of the corporeal body, in particular how technology “represent[s] both escape from the physical body and the fulfilment of erotic desire” (71). For Haraway, this productive liminality is a necessary condition of being cyborg, and she asserts that “Late twentieth-century machines have made thoroughly ambiguous the difference between natural and artificial, mind and body... Our machines are disturbingly lively, and we find ourselves frighteningly inert” (*Simians* 152). It is obvious how such an approach may open up new ways of thinking about the reproductive body; for instance, the interface of technology and organism has a clear impact upon sex and gender and the way that each may be expressed or embodied. However, there are serious problems in the way that Haraway’s work on cyborgs may be applied within feminist contexts, for Haraway argues that “[T]he cyborg is a creature in a post-gender world” (*Simians* 150); that is, the cyborg is an emancipatory and utopian construct precisely because it negates patriarchal domination by making gender obsolete.

Both Haraway and Springer imply that the loss of gendered embodiment could offer freedom from patriarchal domination and power imbalances, but this also insinuates that, in doing so, women should give up their sexed bodies – a call that

certainly sits at odd with philosophies that celebrate sexual difference, such as Christine Battersby's call for an embodied, phenomenological philosophy that doesn't rest on the perceived or assumed subordinate place of the female body, or even Luce Irigaray's exploration of an ethics that is contingent on a mutual respect for sexual difference (*Ethics*). Further, in their discussions of liminal possibilities, neither Haraway nor Springer consider the issue of reproduction adequately; indeed, both scholars see the promise of cyborg politics and ontology as something of a level playing field, so that reproductive freedoms become the freedom *from* reproduction. Haraway's position is explicitly utopian, a self-professed "effort to build an ironic political myth" (*Simians* 147), but in speaking of the promise of cyborg ontology and politics, she neglects to sufficiently consider the use and abuse of power, be it technological, political, physical or otherwise. For instance, in Haraway's enthusiasm for a promising, emancipatory cyborg future, she fails to consider the intent behind and the application of science itself, or the conditions that may bring about such couplings of body and technology.<sup>13</sup>

Such power relations are inherent in the way that reproductive technologies – and the promise, at least, of reproductive freedoms – are experienced. Haraway certainly alludes to the position of reproductive bodies as they exist within power structures: "women's bodies have boundaries that are permeable to both 'visualization' and 'intervention'. Of course, who controls the interpretation of bodily boundaries in medical hermeneutics is a major feminist issue" (*Simians* 169). However, this statement is more an aside than a serious engagement with the issue, and she does not return to this, although I return to the idea of boundaries in chapter six of this thesis. Springer acknowledges that some cyborg narratives about the creation and destruction of life, such as those found in the science fiction films *Demon Seed* (Cammell US 1977) and *Eve of Destruction* (Gibbins US 1991), emphasise sexual and gender difference (81-2).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Haraway addresses some of these conflicts in her 1997 book *Modest\_Witness@Second\_Millennium.FemaleMan\_Meets\_OncoMouse: Feminism and Technoscience* through a discussion of postgender utopia (and dystopia). However, it is important to note that her discussions of technoscience are distanced from and do not resolve the issues of pregnant subjectivity and the sexed body that I have raised here. Further, none of Haraway's latter work has achieved the iconic status of "A Cyborg Manifesto", which remains both influential and widely cited despite some of its problematic features, hence my focus upon this work.

<sup>14</sup> This is especially the case in *Eve of Destruction*. Secret military project Eve VIII is a cyborg (described as "horny as well as psychopathic") who has been made in the image of, and is endowed with the memories of, her creator Dr Eve Simmonds, and in many ways the cyborg is presented as Simmonds' violent, unruly id. Eve's female-ness is often highlighted, especially as she is armed with a warhead that sits where her cervix and uterus should be – something Springer terms her "nuclear vagina" (82).



However, while she comes to argue that the cyborg is an ambivalent character, she reiterates that anxiety regarding the (lack of) integrity of the body, in part influenced by post-nuclear, late twentieth-century threats to the body, leads to a wish to abandon the body and to preserve human consciousness outside the body: a “paradoxical desire to preserve human life by destroying it” (Springer 83). Springer discusses the recurrence of “imaginary” sex in cyborg discourses – “sex without physically touching another human” (76) – and the prevalence of narratives in which (physical, embodied) sexuality is feared, for “sexuality evokes the creation of life” (81). As such, within Springer’s cyborg framework, disembodied sex is for recreational stimulation, not for reproduction. This lack of engagement with – and, perhaps, a rejection of – the notion of sexed, reproductive bodies is problematic. It is difficult to find ways of aligning these conceptualisations, at least as they are stated, with philosophical models of subjectivity that allow for, rather than negate, the experience of pregnancy and the flexibility of the notion of the allegedly ‘individual’ subject.

In the last two chapters I have considered how theories of subjectivity account for – or, more accurately, fail to account for – a subject that deviates from the model of the (young, fit, implicitly male) in-divisible individual. My discussion in chapter three regarding pregnancy and abortion, and my analysis in this chapter of films that focus on reproductive technology and ‘mad science’, have demonstrated that there is an extraordinary dis-ease about the nature of the division between self and other. These horror films dwell on this shifting and mutable boundary and upon the potential porousness of the concept of a discrete self, while also expressing ambivalence about the nature of scientific endeavour. Despite this, I find it surprising that so many of the films discussed here nonetheless work to explicitly reinforce and actively police the boundary between self and other, rather than exploring and celebrating alternate ways of being – the sort of alternative modes that I expand upon in chapter six of this thesis, and which are posited, in principle at least, by the potential cyborg futures of Springer and Haraway. In the case of films about pregnancy, this comes through the enforcement of a competitive distinction between woman and foetus, either by privileging the foetus’s subjectivity over that of the pregnant woman, sometimes through eradicating her, or by framing the foetus as Other, and thus inhuman and not necessarily *of* the woman. Films about reproductive technology, on the other hand, regularly remove the

'need' for the woman's body almost altogether or frame her fleshy subjectivity as an impediment or a problem. That this often translates to the removal of the female subject *herself* implies that the essentialist use-value of the female body is entirely bound up with the capacity to reproduce – a rather unpleasant notion, and something that is darkly suggested at the conclusion of *Splice*. In the next chapter I consider the consequences of this essentialism by shifting my attention from 'pregnant woman' to 'mother' through a consideration of the way that 'ideal' motherhood is discursively constructed.

## CHAPTER FIVE: THE MONSTROUS MATERNAL

### NEGOTIATING DISCOURSES OF MOTHERHOOD

*Nola: Mummies don't do that. Mummies don't hurt their children.*

*Dr. Raglan: They don't? They never do? They never do?*

*Nola: They sometimes do. Sometimes. But then they're bad mummies, they're fucked up mummies!*

*The Brood* (Cronenberg CAN 1979)

In previous chapters I have explored alternative methodologies for the study of gynaeohorror films through discussions of space, corporeality, heteronormativity and subjectivity. In this chapter I look to mothers and mothering in the horror film for, as Tina Miller writes, “the unrealistic assumptions embedded in gendered discourses that pattern women’s lives ... [are] nowhere more apparent than in relation to reproduction, mothering and experiences of motherhood” (337). In particular, I consider how historically specific discourses of motherhood are articulated in horror film. By this I mean the “sets of shared and often unconscious assumptions” (Reid et al. 212) about motherhood that, firstly, contribute to a popular and communal cultural understanding of what ‘normal’ motherhood is and should be, and that, secondly, work to subtly police and enforce this norm. I suggest that horror films can be considered not as static *representations* of motherhood, but as culturally and historically specific, dynamic *negotiations* with the expectations and pressures surrounding the fulfilment of normative motherhood. Further, such popular and cultural understandings both inform and are, in turn, shaped by women’s shifting experiences of motherhood.

In their discussion of the use and value of Foucauldian methods of discourse analysis in cultural studies, Gavin Kendall and Gary Wickham draw from Michel Foucault’s work on systems of power, discipline punishment and reward by indicating that culture can be understood “as a set of (governmental and other) practices aimed at

producing certain sorts of persons, not as a collection of phenomena which hold[s] meanings like a bank, from which people withdraw and to which they deposit" (139). Similarly, Nicola Gavey states in the introduction to *Just Sex? The Cultural Scaffolding Of Rape* that an approach that draws from Foucault's discussions of power, discourse and sexuality:

illuminates how culturally saturated our own conceptions of ourselves are; how culturally shared patterns of meaning and normative practices limit us in various ways – not through repression of more authentic and natural ways of being, but through the installation of frameworks of meaning and practice that guide us on how to be normal members of our cultures. (7)

While I do not engage in depth with Foucault's ideas here, nor with the specific practice of Foucauldian critical discourse analysis, the notion of culture-as-management is nonetheless a salient point: so, discourses of motherhood can be considered those linguistic and social practices (Gavey 84) that manage the way motherhood and the maternal are understood, disciplined, enforced and enacted. Cultural objects – in this case, horror films – are "ragbags of knowledge, practices and programmes gradually put together, with new practices being invented and old practices revitalised and pressed into service for new tasks" (Kendall and Wickham 139). As such, horror films can be considered as cinematic art and popular entertainment as well as discursive artefacts, in that they both contribute to the circulation and enforcement of cultural norms while simultaneously challenging or countering them.

By drawing from this paradigm, in this chapter I seek to problematise dominant readings of mothers in horror, which I argue fail to account for the complicated negotiation of competing discourses of motherhood by placing too great an emphasis on the essentialised construction of the 'good' and 'bad' mother. Consider the following example: while the antagonist in most of the *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* series of slasher films is the hulking, hockey mask-wearing Jason Voorhees, the villain of the first film (Cunningham US 1980) is revealed to be his mother, Pamela. A summer camp reopens after having closed for two decades because of a series of grisly murders, but the new camp counsellors are again picked off one by one by Mrs Voorhees, the camp's cook. She is avenging the death of her young hydrocephalic son, Jason, who had drowned at the former camp while the teenagers who she had asked to mind him were distracted by sex and drug use. Mrs Voorhees now hears voices compelling her to kill those she

blames for the death, an impulse that is reflected in the film's unusual sound design: whispers of "ka-ka-ka-ka ma-ma-ma-ma" represent the dead Jason's commands to "kill them, mommy!"<sup>1</sup> so that Mrs Voorhees's actions are shown to be motivated by both grief and maternal guilt. While Mrs Voorhees can be read as a "malevolent and violent" (Arnold 68) monstrous mother, who is both overbearing and negligent, I suggest that she is a far more ambiguous figure who is shaped by both horror and redemption. Over the course of the franchise (at writing, 12 films), we learn that Mrs Voorhees became pregnant at 15 and was a fiercely protective mother to her son, in particular in her refusal to let him go far from her because of her concerns about his wellbeing. Mrs Voorhees exemplifies a predominant type of mother of the horror film in that she is so devoted to her child that she will do anything to save, protect or avenge him<sup>2</sup> – but, at the same time, she was the one who, through the abdication of her parental responsibilities (in this case to irresponsible teenagers and by being a young solo working mother), put him in danger in the first place. This dissonance and interplay between idealised and transgressive motherhood is emblematic of the way that discourses of motherhood are articulated in the horror film, such that horror films become a site where historically specific anxieties about what ideal motherhood is are variously articulated, enforced and challenged, rather than bluntly represented as 'good' or 'bad'.

Avoiding an emphasis on straight representation, and instead considering films in terms of what competing messages they express or articulate, allows for an analysis of what, exactly, dominant normative discourses of motherhood are. For instance, how has psychoanalysis as popular discourse, rather than as interpretive practice, shaped the image of the mother? How does this once-dominant maternal discourse compare to millennial discourses of motherhood, which focus upon anxieties about the necessary impossibility of being the 'perfect mother'? And how do horror films, as sites of anxiety and fear, both participate in the (re)production of discourses of motherhood (see Gavey

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<sup>1</sup> This is discussed and demonstrated in the 2006 documentary *Going to Pieces: The Rise and Fall of the Slasher Film*.

<sup>2</sup> In *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> Part 2* (Mier US 1981), the mysteriously revived Jason acknowledges his mother's vengeful actions by taking her head – severed at the end of the first film – and body and building a shrine around it in a cave in the woods, where he then leaves pieces of his victims. In that film's final confrontation the heroine convinces him to renege by taking on a "stridently maternal voice" (Clover, *Chain Saws* 40) and instructing him to put down his knife. Jason, cowed by this replacement mother figure, is then wounded with the same machete that killed Pamela Voorhees and he disappears, leaving the shrine behind.

85) and explore the “monstrous maternal”? Through the use of this term I wish to acknowledge Barbara Creed’s term ‘monstrous-feminine’, but seek to apply the understanding of monstrosity in a more nuanced manner that reflects the way that motherhood has been politically, culturally and historically framed and contested. My use of ‘monstrous’ in this incarnation does not simply mean that which is literally horrific, ugly or frightful; in particular, I wish to move away from Barbara Creed’s psychoanalytic formulation of maternal-as-subject in *The Monstrous-Feminine*. Instead, I refer to the contradiction whereby motherhood, as something that is feminine, embodied and Other, serves to prop up patriarchal systems of knowledge and power – indeed, a system of thought that takes for granted the sorts of Cartesian dualisms that I have outlined in chapter three of this thesis. As such, the study of motherhood in horror film can help interrogate what shifting meanings of and anxieties about motherhood are, without making any broad claims for what motherhood ‘is’ and ‘should be’.

## PSYCHOANALYTIC DISCOURSES OF MOTHERHOOD

The analysis of mothers, motherhood and the maternal in cinema was largely developed through and has since been dominated by discussion of the maternal melodrama in particular, films such as King Vidor’s 1937 film *Stella Dallas*; Lucy Fischer, in her introduction to her 1996 book *Cinematernity*, likewise concurs that this emphasis has been “to the exclusion of other modes” (6). E. Ann Kaplan’s *Motherhood and Representation: the Mother in Popular Culture and Melodrama*, published in 1992, remains the most lucid, extensive and authoritative of these works on melodrama and the maternal. Kaplan’s project is to consider how “fictional mother-representations are produced through the tensions between historical and psychoanalytic spheres” (7), from nineteenth century women’s writing to the cinematic maternal melodrama and women’s film. She considers how “prevailing cultural discourse[s]” of an ideal “angel” mother and a bad “witch” mother have been developed and embodied in “myths, images and representations” (9), as opposed to actual lived experiences of mothers and families. Kaplan outlines in depth how motherhood is constructed and understood within patriarchal modes of representation, in particular, how cinematic and written

texts may be variously complicit with or resistant to patriarchally constructed paradigms of womanhood and motherhood. She notes that:

[i]t is on the level of what underlies the daily, conscious actions that representations exist and that we can uncover the mythic signifieds of a culture. These mythic signifiers are most evident in [the popular texts discussed and provide] “evidence” of myths being at work in the culture at any given time. (16)

However, I assert that the analysis of motherhood should not be restricted to films and texts that are explicitly associated with feminine (or feminised) forms of entertainment or representation, such as the ‘weepie’ or the woman’s film. I concur with Kaplan that “women, like everyone else, can function only within the linguistic, semiotic constraints of their historical moment – within that is the discourses available to them” (16), but I argue that such discourses are not confined within, nor necessarily best exemplified by, the melodrama.

While theoretical engagements with motherhood as it is presented in the horror film have focused on the Oedipus complex (T. Williams), unruly bodies (Paul) and the relationship between Oedipality and classical myth (Greven) or have conflated pregnancy with motherhood (Fischer “Birth Traumas”; *Cinematernity*), this theoretical emphasis on maternal melodrama is apparent in the only recent extensive study of horror and motherhood, Sarah Arnold’s 2013 book *Maternal Horror Film: Motherhood and Melodrama*, which considers monstrous motherhood through a psychoanalytic lens. Arnold moves away from Barbara Creed’s extensive discussion of the maternal-as-subject in *The Monstrous-Feminine*, and instead suggests that melodrama is the key to understanding how motherhood is represented not only in horror, but in film in general. Arnold argues that while “psychoanalytic theory researches the child’s maturation by way of the mother, it also determines what kind of mothering is appropriate or inappropriate” (6), and so through acknowledgment of Kaplan’s discussion of ‘phallic’ and self-sacrificing mothers in the melodrama, Arnold frames motherhood in the horror film with regards to what she terms the Good Mother and the Bad Mother.

This formulation is explicitly couched in psychoanalytic discourses. Drawing from Lacan, Arnold frames the Good Mother as the mother who sacrifices herself so that

her child may move into the Symbolic and acknowledge the Law of the Father. The Good Mother conforms with the “popular discourse of motherhood that valorises self-sacrifice, selflessness and nurturance”, which correlates “maternity and utter devotion to childcare” (37) – a construction that is, of course, in line with Julia Kristeva’s discussion of the Virgin Mary in “Stabat Mater”, as well as sociological studies of motherhood (see T. Miller 338). However, given her sacrifice, she is determined in relation to and is often narratively overshadowed by the father, who may either threaten or secure the family unit (Arnold 37). Conversely, Arnold’s Bad Mother “identifies too extremely with the child” (11) and refuses to fulfil the self-sacrificing paradigm of essential motherhood by not giving up her child to the Law of the Father (79). This mother may be a villain, or overbearing, or narcissistic and selfish (68), and she may pass her neuroses down to her child, as Arnold indicates happens in the films *Scream* (Craven US 1996) and *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* (McNaughton US 1986) (72). However, while Arnold’s exploration of the mother in horror film is extensive, I suggest that it is also overly prescribed; her self-imposed categories of the idealised Good Mother and the monstrous Bad Mother are restrictive paradigms, even though Arnold herself acknowledges that they are ambivalent and contested (38). Instead, I argue that these categories are a tempting construct precisely *because* many of the films Arnold discusses draw from popular understandings of psychotherapy – but that does not necessarily mean that psychoanalytic film theory is the best means through which to analyse them given that it, in turn, reinforces the discourses of motherhood that the films themselves are drawing from and recycling.

It is important to consider how psychoanalysis, as a discourse rather than an interpretive practice, has been recirculated in the popular imagination, and in particular how it situates one’s relationship with their mother as contributing to, if not acting as the cause of, psychological problems. The mainstream popularity of Freudian psychoanalysis in the United States from the mid 1940s and through into the 1960s<sup>3</sup> has led to a widespread ‘layperson’s’ understanding and normalisation of Freudian theories (Plant 48; Hendershot 93-4). These popular understandings of psychoanalysis have impacted upon the conceptualisation of family relations and how they may inform or

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<sup>3</sup> This is apparent through the use of the sort of data analysis that is employed through the digital humanities: see “Google Ngram Viewer” for a plot of the occurrence of the terms “Freud” and “psychoanalysis” in a corpus of books between 1920 and 2000; note the sharp increase between 1940 and 1960, with a particular spike for “Freud” in the mid 50s.



influence one's mental health. Freudian models posited that the home and family were the crucible of both personal development and psychological pathology, while also arguing that "the completion of women's [psychic] development, and women's experience of fulfilment, require[d] mothering" (DiQuinzio 176). Some practitioners of psychoanalysis wrongly blamed some psychiatric and developmental issues on maternal dysfunction: for instance, in 1943, the term "refrigerator mother" was first applied to women whose coldness towards their children allegedly resulted in conditions such as autism (Plant 13, 185) and, in 1953, 'direct analysis' founder John N. Rosen infamously noted that "a schizophrenic is always one who is reared by a woman who suffers from a perversion of the maternal instinct" (97). The simplistic idea that the relationship with the mother could be the root of psychological problems is one of the most popularly recognised of Freud's theories; the term "tell me about your mother" has gone on to be an often comic shorthand for Freud's therapeutic practice in general.<sup>4</sup>

It is such a popular, non-academic, and un-nuanced account that informs the American cinematic representation of psychoanalysis – and, given the historic global dominance of the American film industry and the increasingly transnational model embraced by Hollywood, its representation beyond the United States. Thus, the psychoanalytic stories and representations in films about horrific motherhood, particularly with regards to mental illness, can be read as the highly simplified product of popularly received and recycled psychoanalytic narratives more than they are indicative of a psychoanalytic 'truth' (Kaplan 110).<sup>5</sup> This is true even of more balanced psychoanalytic approaches to mother-child relationships, such as the emphasis placed upon the 'good-enough' mother in object relations theory. As Lisa Baraitser and Imogen Tyler (2010) note:

just be good-enough, that's all it takes. And yet, good-enough turns out to be an almost inhuman juggling act of self-management, consistency, care and control,

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<sup>4</sup> This phrase, or variations of it, has been widely used to parody or draw from Freud's theories by characters in films and television programmes. A particularly pointed example is in the American teen comedy *Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure* (Herek US 1989) when Freud himself, who has been transported from Vienna in 1901 to modern day California, asks one character to "tell me about your mother" and also asks Bill if he'd like to be analysed. The joke in this instance is that Bill's stepmother is very attractive, only a few years older than Bill himself, and an object of sexual desire for both Bill and Ted.

<sup>5</sup> This is perhaps a reflection of three things: how Freud's own interpretations have been conflated with constructions by his successors, how narrative in and of itself is utilised within the therapeutic setting as a maker of meaning, and the way in which narrative claims in psychoanalytic settings do not necessarily align with verifiable reality-based claims; see Roth.

which, if one fails, has the direst consequences for the ones one loves. It appears that psychoanalytic thinking can't quite escape from the link between motherhood, madness and the sublime. (122)

### **THE LEGACY OF MRS BATES – NORMA, THELMA AND NOLA**

This construction of the mother within psychoanalytic discourses figures heavily in the depiction of motherhood in horror film, and perhaps the most famous presentation of the wicked mother figure is that in Alfred Hitchcock's 1960 film *Psycho*. In the film, office worker Marian Crane has stolen money from her employer and flees town. She stays at the quiet and remote Bates Motel, where she clearly interests the motel's owner, Norman, but while she showers she is murdered by someone who appears to be Norman's mother. Her sister and a policeman come searching for her, and they discover that years previously Norman had killed his mother, Norma, and her lover, and he now keeps Mother's mummified corpse in their house. Norman had spent ten years living out his dysfunctional, co-dependent, abusive relationship with Norma by taking on the role of Mother and then using 'her' to violently repudiate his own sexual desires. *Psycho* lends itself very well to a psychoanalytic reading, and has been considered within various psychoanalytic frameworks by numerous writers, including Barbara Creed (*The Monstrous-Feminine* 139-151), Lacanian researcher Robert Samuels (135-148), and Jungian psychiatrist Angela Connolly (420-422), as well as scholars who generally work outside of psychoanalytic paradigms, such as in film critic Raymond Durnat's authoritative 2002 book *A Long Hard Look At Psycho*, which provides an extensive explication of the film's formal features and textual themes, including its emphasis upon Freudian psychological causation.

Importantly, Norman Bates' imagined Mother – controlling, infantilising and abusive – has come, over time, to be a template for the popular representation of maternal overbearance in horrific films (see Clover, *Chain Saws* 49). This archetype is particularly apparent in a cluster of films from the mid-1970s to the early 1980s that are remarkable for their thematic similarities. *The Killing Kind* (Harrington US 1973), *The Exorcist* (Friedkin US 1973), *Carrie* (De Palma US 1976), *Burnt Offerings* (Curtis US-IT 1976), *The Brood* (Cronenberg CAN 1979) and *Maniac* (Lustig US 1980) all feature monstrous mother figures who in some way draw from or reinforce the narcissistic,

dominating and hysterical 'phallic' mother paradigm<sup>6</sup> that, while present in the melodrama and thrillers prior to 1960, was most obviously introduced into the modern horror genre by way of *Psycho*. In *Maniac*, as in *Psycho*, the oppressive, controlling mother figure is a product of the killer's memory and imagination, while in *Burnt Offerings*, the malevolent presence of the long dead matriarch Mrs Allardyce permeates the house itself, and ultimately insinuates its way into the body of one of the house's new caretakers. In *Carrie*, the eponymous character's mother, Margaret, is a disturbed and abusive religious fundamentalist with a twisted view of sex and sexuality, and she is ultimately killed by Carrie during Carrie's telekinetic rampage. In *The Exorcist*, it is heavily implied that young Regan's possession is facilitated by the independent lifestyle of her actor mother, Chris. Chris, who is framed as a modern, 'liberated' woman, is seeking a divorce and is tacitly blamed for removing a strong paternal presence from the home, which is then reinstated by the Catholic priests who are called for the exorcism.<sup>7</sup>

The obscure psychological horror *The Killing Kind* and David Cronenberg's widely studied body horror *The Brood* likewise draw from this paradigm, and here I wish to consider both of these films in greater detail. While each film acknowledge the archetype of the domineering mother - the former film in particular wears its adherence to pop-psychological interpretations of monstrous motherhood clearly on its sleeve - an analysis of both films demonstrates how helpful it is to consider psychoanalysis as one of a number of competing discourses of motherhood, rather than as the key to the films' interpretation.

At first glance, *The Killing Kind* appears to fulfil the dominant paradigm of the overbearing 'bad' mother in that it aligns the simple and troubled teenage protagonist Terry's psychopathy and sexual dysfunction with his mother Thelma's smothering,

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<sup>6</sup> See chapter six of E. Ann Kaplan's *Motherhood and Representation* for a detailed appraisal of this paradigm.

<sup>7</sup> The trope of the phallic mother is presented in a knowing, tongue-in-cheek and exceptionally gory manner in zombie horror comedy *Braindead* ka *Dead Alive* (Jackson NZ 1992), which is set in 1957: Lionel lives with his overbearing mother, Vera, who is deeply upset when Lionel falls in love with a local shopkeeper's daughter. Vera is bitten by a plague-bearing 'Sumatran rat-monkey', which turns her into a zombie and sets off a zombie outbreak. In the film's climax Lionel confronts his mother, who is now an enormous and grotesque shambling creature with pendulous breasts (and yet is still wearing her string of pearls). He shouts at her, announcing that he is no longer afraid of her, but her bloated stomach cracks open and he is drawn inside her while Vera tells him that no one will love him like her. Not to be stopped, Lionel hacks his way out of the monstrous womb with a crucifix and is reborn, triumphant, in a torrent of viscera.

overbearing care. At the opening of the film, Terry is involved in a pack rape. The men try to goad him into physically participating, but he is stand-offish and unable to achieve an erection. While Terry appears to be morbidly fascinated by the crime itself, when his associates force him down onto the woman, Tina, his horror at both the prospect of sex and the confronting sight of the victim's naked body is shown through a freeze frame of his face, which is contorted in a rictus of fear and disgust. This scene is provocative and highly problematic: the rape is filmed so that the camera lingers upon Tina's body in an appreciative, suggestive fashion, asking the audience to take a voyeuristic pleasure in the proceedings and suggesting that the woman's sexual attributes may have contributed to her attack. This frames Terry's transgression not as his participation in the rape, but his inability to be aroused by such an overtly sexual display, such that the film frames his failure to conform to a domineering form of violent masculine heterosexuality as its own sort of victimhood, thus privileging his apparent 'suffering' over that of the victim. This is exacerbated by the choice of actress; Tina is played by Playboy Playmate Susan Bernard, whose best known work prior to the film was as Linda, the under-aged girlfriend of hot-rodder Tommy in Russ Meyer's 1965 sexploitation film *Faster Pussycat, Kill! Kill!* and her role was to be trussed up at the hands of a trio of enormous-breasted, violent go-go dancers who spend the film committing crimes and dancing bare-chested. Tina names Terry as one of her rapists and he is sent to jail, although Terry considers this to have been a false accusation.

After some years he is released into the care of his mother, an expansive and enthusiastic woman who runs a boarding house. Thelma is obsessed with her son and their relationship veers between an intimate family bond and something more sexual. She fusses and frets over him as if he were a child, kissing him, peeking at him while he showers, bringing him glasses of chocolate milk and taking pictures of him to frame and place around the house, because there are "never enough, baby, never enough". Soon, Terry begins to kill neighbourhood animals and women at the unwitting behest of his mother, for each time she complains about someone or something, Terry takes extreme measures to eliminate the problem so as to grant her "wishes". Further, as with Norman Bates' murders, each crime is preceded by a moment of arousal and is associated with the cognitive dissonance he experiences as the result of disavowing his sexual impulses. This relationship between sexual dysfunction and violence becomes clear during a

dream sequence in which Terry sits in a baby's crib with the rape victim, while Thelma and her friends point baby's bottles at him and chant "shame!" Things come to a head when in a moment of anger and frustration Terry rubs Thelma's shoulders and then begins to choke her, but changes his mind and walks away.

This relationship clearly has the hallmarks of the 'bad' or 'phallic' motherhood paradigm, in which the mother "satisfies needs for power [over her child] that her ideal function prohibits" (Kaplan 47), but the relationship between the two is more complex, especially as Thelma herself is a clearly-drawn, nuanced and sympathetic character rather than a psychotic harriidan. When Terry cries out "you're like this big heavy pillow across my face, you fat whore!" she responds by telling him how hard it was to raise a bastard son, a statement that clearly marks her socially subordinate position as a single mother in a time when single motherhood was rare and treated with disdain. Her infantilisation of her son and the cloying attention that she heaps upon him are not framed as cruel, but rather a misguided attempt to protect him from the outside world and to guard their two-person family unit. Where Terry sees her as controlling, she sees her actions as a life of self-sacrifice for the only person she loves and the only person who loves her. When she discovers that he has been killing 'for' her, she is distraught. She wants to save him from returning to prison – "he's got about as much chance as a snowball in hell", she cries to herself – so she kills him by putting poison in his chocolate milk, a highly symbolic act. They sit together on the couch and she strokes his head, telling him about the various milestones of his life while he dies, and then she takes one last photo of him and waits for the police. This ending is framed as an enormous act of sacrifice: despite devoting her life to him, and repeatedly telling him how much she needs him, Thelma chooses to give up her son rather than have him suffer any further. *The Killing Kind* demonstrates how hard it is to mark a firm distinction between 'good' and 'bad' mothering, and instead it shows a complicated relationship between mother and child that is largely shaped by Thelma's struggle to reconcile her love for her son with her social position and her (in)ability to mother in an appropriate way.

These limitations are borne out through a reconsideration of David Cronenberg's *The Brood*, a film that has been extensively analysed most notably by Barbara Creed in her discussion of the 'monstrous womb' (*The Monstrous Feminine* 43-58). Nola is a troubled woman with a history of psychological trouble, and she is

receiving long-term, live-in treatment at the Somafree Institute of Psychoplasmics, a cutting-edge but contentious psychiatric treatment centre. Her husband Frank, who is not allowed to see her as a part of her treatment, raises their young daughter Candice alone; ironically, he owns a business that restores homes while his own marriage and home life crumbles. Nola's psychiatrist, Dr Hal Raglan, has developed a means of therapy that allows a patient's inner rage to manifest itself as a somatoform disorder; one patient is covered in lesions related to his issues with his father, and another, who has left the Institute, claims that his lymphosarcoma is as a result of his own externalised self-hatred. Nola is Raglan's favourite patient, and her rage manifests itself as short-lived hare-lipped childlike creatures – her brood – which she births parthenogenetically from an external womb. These creatures carry out Nola's subconscious wishes by finding and killing people who Nola feels are threatening her, including her parents and Candice's school teacher, who has a brief flirtation with Frank.

Creed, like others who have read the film,<sup>8</sup> focuses on the *The Brood's* horrific finale, when Nola reveals her womb-sac to Frank. Frank is appalled and strangles Nola, and as such Creed suggests that Nola's rage has been caused by her "husband's disgust at her maternal, mothering functions" because "woman in her reproductive role, repulses man" (*The Monstrous-Feminine* 45). While the film suggests that Nola has always been disturbed, even in childhood, I argue that this climactic scene can also be read as Frank's final rejection of Dr Raglan's therapeutic practices and the damage they have wrought upon the family. Despite Dr Raglan's assurances that he was helping Nola, it is apparent that he is interested in her only insofar as she furthers his research; he calls her his "Queen Bee" and even deserts his other patients (with tragic results) so that he can give her his full attention. Even the film's opening points to this skewed relationship: Raglan's preferred method of presenting his work to the public is through demonstrations in front of an audience in a small theatre, which frames the therapy as performance art. Dr Raglan positions himself as analyst-as-father, both eroticised and lauded, and when he succeeds in re-routing transference from "patient to analyst" to

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<sup>8</sup> Director David Cronenberg's corpus is widely studied; for example, see chapter three of Maggie Humm's *Feminism and Film*, which discusses Cronenberg's films with regards to feminist theories of mothering and reproductive technologies. For specific engagements with *The Brood*, see Arnold 79-91, chapter five of William Beard's *The Artist as Monster: The Cinema of David Cronenberg*, and Tristanne Connolly's "Strange Births in the Canadian Wilderness".

“patient to body” he capitalises on his discovery without providing any further care. ‘Psychoplasms’, as he calls it, is shown to be a treatment that is far more destructive than the initial disease; it is not the illness that is horrific, it is the effect of the therapeutic model, which physically articulates and re-energises disease through somatic transformation rather than eliminating or mitigating it. When Dr Raglan is unable to maintain Nola or her ‘id-children’, he is killed by them.

*The Brood*, then, can be read as taking a dim view of these sorts of extreme psychodynamic practices for it frames them as predatory, while also situating them within the context of broader discourses of motherhood. At the clinic Nola is further from her ‘natural’ family than she ever was, to the extent that she would happily preside over her bestial, parthenogenetic clutch of children rather than rejoining Frank and Candice. While she is a ‘good’ animal mother to her brood, even licking one clean after she has bitten through its amniotic sac, she is an ineffectual mother to her human child, not only because of accusations that she has hurt Candice during some of the girl’s visits to the facility (although no hard evidence is presented that Nola, personally, did anything), but because of her history of absenteeism. In turn, Nola accuses her mother Juliana of being abusive and neglectful – a “fucked up mummy, fucked up and bad” – although again, there is little specific evidence for this beyond Nola’s allegations. Juliana indicates that she also had trouble with her own mother, which establishes a matrilinear line of mother-daughter conflict (see Arnold 72), but that this trauma is subjective; as she says, “Thirty seconds after you’re born you have a past and sixty seconds after that you begin to lie to yourself about it.” In short, there is a great deal of anxiety regarding how to be an effective, loving mother, but this anxiety is manipulated by Raglan for his own selfish ends. Nola is no longer capable of looking after her human daughter, but refuses to let anyone else do so, something that is borne out by her brood’s attack on Candice’s kindergarten teacher. The categories of ‘essential’ motherhood – the innate, instinctual and perhaps animal ability to mother – and ‘ideal’ motherhood – the ability to do so in a socially and culturally appropriate manner – are both complicated and critiqued. The insinuation that it is motherhood *itself* that is inherently unstable comes unstuck; rather, I suggest it is how motherhood is negotiated that is interrogated.

What *The Killing Kind* and *The Brood* demonstrate is that an interpretive reliance on the archetypes of the 'good' and 'bad' mother, which Sarah Arnold refers to with regards to the maternal melodrama, fails to acknowledge the complexity and ambiguity that is inherent in the exploration and articulation of motherhood in the horror film. Instead, I argue that it is fruitful to consider dominant and conflicting messages about the nature of ideal motherhood, and to let these messages – these popular discourses – act as historically specific indications as to what a mother should be and do. For example, Arnold's Bad Mother is one who "threatens to keep the child from entering the Symbolic" (75) and who tries to control the child through oppressive maternal authority either through direct, physical means, or by asserting her dominance, even after death, by "'haunt[ing]' from afar" (93). However, this presumes a certain type of strict, heteronormative nuclear structure, so that the relationship between the child and so-called 'non traditional' families, queer families or cultures and groups that share child raising duties among the extended family or across multiple partners are unaccounted for or must be shoehorned into a highly restrictive paradigm. Even in the case of heteronormative nuclear families that do conform to this framework, ideas about whether or not a mother 'should' give up her child, and how this should happen, have changed over time.

In one such example from the western world, feminist historian Rebecca Jo Plant outlines such cultural shifts in her 2010 account of motherhood in the United States, *Mom: the Transformation of Motherhood in Modern America*. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century alone the construction of ideal motherhood shifted from Victorian 'mother love' – the veneration of the mother as the moral core of the household, with the associated expectation that maternal influence should be of paramount importance in the adult son's life (89-91) – to a more distanced, scientific type of mothering in the decades following World War II. This latter framework was heavily influenced by the popularisation of Freudian psychoanalysis as well as the anti-maternalist stance of Betty Friedan's seminal 1963 book *The Feminine Mystique* (see chapter 5), and this shift "facilitated white, middle-class women's gradual incorporation into the political and economic order as individuals rather than as wives and mothers" (Plant 2). Likewise, opinions on how to 'successfully' mother are wildly divergent, even within tight-knit or specific communities (Lancaster 186-7). As a blunt and recent example, both



‘attachment parenting’, an intensive framework that emphasises the development of strong emotional connections between the child and caregiver (usually the biological mother) through extensive emotional and physical availability (“API’s Eight Principles of Parenting”), and ‘free-range parenting’, a looser attitude that emphasises a child’s independence and works to counteract overparenting or ‘helicopter’ parenting,<sup>9</sup> have achieved prominence in recent mainstream debates about mothering.

## **MATERNALISM AND ESSENTIAL MOTHERHOOD**

While socially and culturally sanctioned models of motherhood have changed over time, the notion of ‘essential motherhood’ – the core assumption that motherhood is necessarily conflated with nurturance – has not. Even in its core definition, the term ‘maternal’ as ‘mother-ness’ implies a sense of nurturing care and emotional attachment that is not as present in the understanding of paternalism. ‘Maternal’ indicates a degree of closeness that ‘paternal’ does not – for instance, the term ‘paternalism’ refers to the traditional relationship between a father and a child whereby the father imposes his authority over the child for the child’s own good. Paternalism refers to actions, such as the creation of laws, that are interventionist, coercive and which may inhibit liberty (G. Dworkin), but which are put forth with good intentions for the safety of the individual and the community. Comparatively, maternalism refers to “ideologies and discourses which exalted women’s capacity to mother and applied to society as a whole the values they attached to that role: care, nurturance and morality” (Koven and Michel 4). It has been used to refer to a variety of social, welfare, and public policies such as pro-natalism, state-supplied income for mothers (Orloff, “Gender in the Welfare State” 57) or “family wages” for working fathers (Orloff, “Gender in the Welfare State” 61), and the suggestion that women should be encouraged to stay at home to care for their child fulltime instead of returning to work (Orloff, “From Maternalism to “Employment for All””). Both paternalism and maternalism are associated with benevolence and seek to

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<sup>9</sup> The Free-Range Kids website, started by American journalist Lenore Skenazy, humorously offers its mission statement as “Fighting the belief that our children are in constant danger from creeps, kidnapping, germs, grades, flashers, frustration, failure, baby snatchers, bugs, bullies, men, sleepovers and/or the perils of a non-organic grape”. Skenazy set up her website after she came to prominence (and was labelled “America’s worst mom”) after writing a column about letting her 9-year-old ride the New York subway by himself (McDermott). See Medina and Magnuson (91) for a further discussion of modern ideologies of intensive parenting.

benefit communities and societies at large, but, as is reflected by the Freudian framework of family dynamics, law is constructed as coming from the father and nurture comes from the mother. So, before considering motherhood in the horror film, here I outline one of the fundamental imperatives and contradictions of ideologically complicit motherhood so as to establish one of the core tensions at the heart of the construction of discourses of ideal motherhood: whether or not the ability and willingness to mother is innate and a key aspect of what it means to be a woman.

In the introduction to *The Impossibility of Motherhood: Feminism, Individualism and the Problem of Mothering*, feminist philosopher Patrice DiQuinzio highlights the ideological formation of motherhood as a cultural and biological imperative by framing 'essential' motherhood as the construction that motherhood is "natural and inevitable". This is a function of "woman's essentially female nature" which "requires women's exclusive and selfless attention to and care of children based on women's psychological and emotional capacities for empathy, awareness of the needs of others, and self sacrifice" (xiii) – that is, that women are 'made' to be mothers not just in a biological, reproductive sense, but that their emotional and psychological selves are as they are so as to facilitate women's capacity for motherhood. Thus, essential motherhood is an integral part of the construction of femininity, dictating that "all women want to be and should be mothers [clearly implying] that women who do not manifest the qualities required by mothering and / or refuse mothering are deviant or deficient as women" (xiii). Such a construction challenges the autonomy and subjectivity of women and presumes a necessary duality, implying that the only way that a woman may be 'whole' is to gestate, birth, nurture and guide their child. As with discourses of pregnancy, this implies that the mother must defer to the child's subjectivity in that they must look to themselves *or* their children (Featherstone 11; Ussher, *The Madness of Women* 192). Discourses of ideal motherhood also frame motherhood as something that women can (and must) find enjoyable and enriching, but in doing so, offers a set of criteria that cannot possibly be fulfilled. As E. Ann Kaplan indicates, the ideal mother is "pure and unsullied, heroic in her undying loyalty and often ultimate forgiveness" (99) – that is, a fiction.

## MOTHERHOOD AS INSTINCT AND IMPERATIVE

The popular myth of ideal motherhood is both reflected in and produced and reinforced by anthropomorphised accounts of animal mothering and reproduction. Narrative and descriptive voiceovers and story editing in nature documentaries and news stories about animal behaviour draw from socially constructed assumptions about how men and women ‘should’ act, and such assumptions and ‘common sense’ interpretations are used in turn to inform, naturalise and justify certain types of human behaviour (Coward 212; see also Crowther and Leith). Rosalind Coward outlines how such programmes “*assume as much as they explain*” (author’s emphasis), drawing upon normative, heterosexist narratives of male dominance and aggression, female submissiveness, “women’s nesting instincts” (213) and so on, “assuming that human meanings of ‘mother’, ‘father’, ‘property’ or ‘home’ can just be transferred on to the animals” (213).<sup>10</sup> Such narratives are invoked in discussions of cross-species friendships and fostering. As a popular example, a 2009 news story from American television network CBS, which was celebrating Mother’s Day, features a dog who nurses a litter of motherless kittens, as well as archival footage of a cat nursing a wounded fawn, a foal being ‘raised’ by a goat, and a leopard ‘mothering’ the offspring of a baboon she had just killed. The voiceover continues:

Why would an animal show such grace? Why would Lily [the labrador], when one of the kittens fell into her water dish, rescue the little troublemaker and carry her off to safety? Why – other than the obvious? ... For most mothers, it’s just what they do. An instinct so deeply wired into them, that often all they know is to love and care for life. Understanding it completely will take scientists many more years, but feel free to appreciate it this weekend. (“Mother of the year?”)

The commonsense, “obvious” implication is that ‘motherhood’, framed here as the overwhelming impulse to nurture wounded or needy young, is an instinct so strong that it transcends species boundaries and, in the case of the leopard, the desire to kill its prey – never mind that the baboon was only orphaned because the leopard attacked its

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<sup>10</sup> This is also reflected in the gendered discourses surrounding the sperm and egg in human reproduction, as discussed in chapter three of this thesis. For a recent linguistic account of the anthropomorphism in naturalist David Attenborough’s narration of the BBC’s 2009 wildlife series *Life*, see Sealey and Oakley.

mother<sup>11</sup>, or that dogs sometimes crush or step onto their puppies, or that maternal infanticide is common in a wide variety of species (Hrdy; see also Lancaster 186) . Indeed, what is considered here as 'normal' human monogamous heterosexual coupling is far from the norm in the animal kingdom.<sup>12</sup> Instead, this nurturing behaviour is framed as universal, all encompassing and inherently gendered, although somehow beyond the ken of scientists, and the news clip's final sentence actively encourages the viewer to take the anthropomorphised interpretation of the dog's behaviour and apply it to their understandings of human motherhood.

Where the invocation of 'good' animal motherhood is used to encourage sentiment and to ratify ideas about the supposed universal nature of positive maternal affect, the same animal comparisons draw a markedly different result in the discussion of destructive, violent or visceral motherhood. Here, motherhood is conflated with primal instinct so as to imply that a mother's natural (animal) bond with her children is so strong that they will stop at nothing to protect or retrieve their children. Here, allegedly monstrous motherhood draws its horror from the extreme lengths that mothers will (allegedly) go to protect their offspring. This 'Mama Bear'<sup>13</sup> trope posits that a mother will become dangerous when something comes between her and her 'cub',<sup>14</sup> but is rarely articulated in terms of 'animal' representations of fatherhood – an

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<sup>11</sup> See "Lessons of the Hunt" for a National Geographic photo essay by Dereck and Beverley Joubert on this particular leopard's development and relationship with her own mother, from infancy to independent adulthood. Beverley Joubert's images of the subadult leopard and the baby baboon, events which are stated to be "bizarre", are framed in such a way as to suggest that the leopard has learned from her own 'good' mother and that she is approaching a time when she will need to be a 'good' mother to her own cub. The caption beneath an image of the leopard grooming and sleeping with the tiny infant baboon before it died from cold reads "Was Legadema [the leopard] feeling early maternal instincts?"

<sup>12</sup> See biologist Bruno Bagemihl's 1999 book *Biological Exuberance* for an exhaustive account of the diversity of sexual behaviour in the animal kingdom, in particular the widespread nature of homosexuality, bisexuality, and other forms of non-reproductive sexual behaviour.

<sup>13</sup> For a recent American example of how this rhetoric is applied within political discourses, see Alexandra Silver's "Mama Grizzlies" and Janet McCabe's "Tea with Mother" for a discussion about how Sarah Palin, the Republican vice-presidential candidate in the United States' 2008 elections, invoked primal motherhood as a political ideal.

<sup>14</sup> This is explicitly referenced in Quentin Tarantino's revenge action films *Kill Bill vol. 1 & 2* (2003 and 2004), for this primal urge drives the narrative: the assassin protagonist, known throughout much of the film as "The Bride", sets out to get bloody revenge on her former boss and lover, Bill, who attempted to kill her on her wedding day and, to the best of her knowledge, killed her unborn child. The Bride's discovery that her child was born, is still alive, and has been raised by Bill drives the second film. Near the end of the second film The Bride's name is revealed to be Beatrix Kiddo, stripping her of her impersonal moniker and reframing her in an almost infantilising fashion, and when she drives away, having reclaimed her daughter and killed Bill, an old fashioned title card reads "The lioness has rejoined her cub, and all is right in the jungle". Kiddo's ferocity is framed as an animalistic instinct to first avenge and then

association that, again, reinforces the alignment of women with nature and men with culture.

This construction of a mother as innately ‘wired’ to defend her young is a common trope in horror cinema and monster movies, combining ‘common sense’ understandings of maternal nature with the spectacle of female ferocity. Horror movie monsters such as the deformed bear in eco-horror *Prophecy* (Frankenheimer US 1979), which is discussed in chapter three of this thesis, as well as Grendel’s mother (*Beowulf and Grendel* (Gunnarsson CAN-UK-ICE-US-AUS 2005), *Beowulf* (Zemeckis US 2007), and other cinematic adaptations of the epic poem), and the titular monster in Larry Cohen’s film *Q: The Winged Serpent* (US 1982), as well as the giant moth *kaiju*, Mothra, in the Japanese Godzilla films, are framed as all the more terrifying because they are driven by maternal wrath. These creatures undermine the passivity and submissiveness valued by conventional femininity, and they are willing to sacrifice their own lives to save or seek vengeance for their children. In the climax of the science fiction horror film *Aliens* (Cameron US-UK 1986), Ellen Ripley, wearing an enormous powered exoskeleton, rescues the young girl Newt from the Alien Queen, whose eggs she has just destroyed. Ripley’s shout of “leave her alone, you bitch!”, the image of the film’s original poster (fig. 5.1) – Ripley brandishing a gun and carrying a clearly terrified Newt<sup>15</sup> – and the fury of the eggless Queen all imply that both Ripley and the Queen are more dangerous for being slighted mothers (or, in the case of Ripley, a mother proxy; see chapter six of this thesis for an in-depth appraisal of this film).

## LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OF TRANSGRESSIVE MOTHERHOOD

While essential motherhood is discursively constructed as a moral and biological imperative, there are negative consequences for women who fail to fulfil these ideals. This is an area that has received a great deal of attention from scholars. Studies in the

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protect her young, and that once these goals are achieved she may take on a more docile maternal persona.

<sup>15</sup> While this was replaced by a simpler image for the film’s theatrical release poster, the image of Ripley and Newt featured extensively on other advertising material, including the film’s DVD and VHS covers. The art director of this poster, Mike Salisbury, calls this image “Classic Joan d’ Arc [sic] protecting child from danger. [...] It is not the almost-Catholic image of the messianic egg in the sky of *Alien*, but ours is in the tradition of the indelible image of the Madonna protecting the child” (Salisbury).



**Fig. 5.1 “Classic Joan d’ Arc protecting child from danger”:** In the original publicity image for *Aliens*, Ripley-as-mother carries the young girl Newt, protecting her from the furious Alien Queen (Mike Salisbury, “James Cameron Bummed Me Out”).

last ten years have focused on issues as diverse as the prominence of discourses of ‘bad’ and ‘thwarted’ motherhood used by Canadian mothers with substance abuse problems (Reid et al.), the mother-blaming of British and American women whose children are medicated for attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (Singh), the guilt and frustration felt by Australian mothers receiving contradictory advice on how to breastfeed successfully (Hauck and Irurita), the way that discourses of class and ethnicity are integral to dominant constructions of victimhood and ‘transgressive’ motherhood in cases of domestic abuse in New Zealand (Elizabeth), and the legal implications for battered women in the United States who are charged with failing to protect their children from abusive fathers (Dunlap). Each of these studies indicates how women may be implicitly or explicitly held to account, by themselves, others, or the state, for failing to conform to normative ideas of what a ‘good’ mother is, even if those ideas are contradictory. For example, an anonymous law student who grew up in an abusive household is quoted in Justine A. Dunlap’s legal appraisal as arguing that the

designation of a battered mother as a 'bad' mother who should have her children removed ignores that many of the mother's self-sacrificing behaviours, such as putting herself in harm's way to save her child, would otherwise be considered hallmarks of a 'good' mother (565).

An extreme example of this is outlined by Australian law professor Emma Cunliffe who in her 2011 book *Murder, Medicine and Motherhood* refers to the insidious nature of the ideology of motherhood as it pertains to cases of infanticide. She notes that while:

Academic commentary of child homicide often remarks that it is difficult to persuade sceptical judges and jurors that a mother has killed her children ... a number of recent wrongful convictions of mothers suggests that prosecutors and courts may, for a period of time, have been too ready to accept allegations of homicide. (2)

Cunliffe discusses two high profile cases of infanticide from Australia: that of Kathleen Folbigg, who in 2003 was convicted with regards to the deaths of her four infant children between 1989 and 1999, but who still protests her innocence, and that of Lindy Chamberlain, who in 1982 was convicted of killing her infant daughter while camping, but who was later exonerated when sufficient evidence was found to back up her claim that a dingo had taken the child.

Trials such as these can be considered a part of a wider hegemonic process and, in these instances, dominant ideological notions of both essential and ideal motherhood were perpetuated through the conflation of so-called 'common sense' understandings of motherhood with actual, hard evidence. As such, Cunliffe illustrates how, in each case, the taken-for-granted notion of what it is to be a 'good' mother permeated the cases of both the defence and the prosecution. Cunliffe suggests that Folbigg's "guilt was ascertained through a web of medical and social knowledge about motherhood and infant death" rather than through evidential proof beyond all reasonable doubt (Cunliffe 2), in particular value judgements over whether or not Folbigg's insistence on taking on paid work outside the home contravened "privatised, gendered ordering of childcare responsibilities within the heterosexual nuclear family" as they related to Folbigg's aptitude as a mother (98-9). Similarly, in the Chamberlain case, such notions "operate[d] as an implicit comparator by which a particular mother's behaviour can be judged", which extended from the charge of murder to "other aspects of [Chamberlain's] behaviour, especially her caregiving" (101). Chamberlain was also deemed to have

failed to fulfil constructions of ideal motherhood because of her blank affect throughout her trial, especially in contrast to her husband's openly emotional state, such that "her failure to grieve in a prescribed manner was considered strong evidence of her guilt" (Doka and Martin 151).

What these brief and selected 'real world' examples demonstrate is that the monstrous maternal is that which contravenes or fails to conform to the construction of essential motherhood, which is broadly deemed to be an innate capability to mother (and to want to mother) in a socially and culturally appropriate (that is, an 'ideal') manner, as opposed to a more prescriptive psychoanalytic construction that indicates that the woman's maternal self-sacrifice is necessitated by the child's shift into the Symbolic. However, this highlights an enormous problem, and one that will remain central to my argument over the course of this chapter: both 'essential' and 'ideal motherhood' are fictions whose methods and criteria change over time, yet deviation from this is deemed monstrous and punishable. As such, I argue that the monstrous maternal, rather than referring to a specific type of 'bad mother', is the necessary and fundamental inability of mothers to be able to comply with the socially, culturally and historically specific construction of the ideal mother.

## **MILLENNIAL MOTHERING**

From here I move away from this model of the 'bad' mother of the maternal melodrama by considering how horror films from the late 1990s and the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century focus on lingering anxieties about the dissolution of the nuclear family through the presentation of single mothers, or mothers who operate apart from the child's father. Here I argue that millennial mothers are marked by instability and ambiguity, particularly as when the mother is presented as trying to be 'good' – that is, conforming to essential and ideal motherhood – she is nonetheless the person who first places her child in danger or who poses the greatest threat to the child. I close with an analysis of the 2009 film *Grace* (Solet US-CAN 2009), which interrogates the 'self-sacrificing' mother role while also presenting a generational conflict between maternal ideals. Through these analyses I argue that despite changes in discourses of motherhood



over time, the mother figure is always-already monstrous, for despite her best efforts, she can never fulfil the criteria of ideal motherhood.

While the films from the 1970s that I have discussed here feature mothers whose construction is explicitly informed by psychoanalytic models, films in the late 1990s and the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century have looked more to mothers who try their best to fulfil the criteria of the ideal mother, but who are doomed to fail. I do not wish to make broad generalised claims for shifts in the zeitgeist, for the change in social and cultural conditions between the two periods of time is immense. Such change is informed by from social, cultural and political shifts as diverse as the social and economic implications of the shift of more mothers into the workforce (Vincent et al.), the impact of the so-called 'War on Terror' upon public discourses of fear and risk (Altheide), and – importantly – the influence of the internet and other communication and mobile technologies upon modern mothers and mothering practices (Madge and O'Connor). However, there is one obvious difference between the horror films from the 1970s I have mentioned – *The Brood*, *The Killing Kind*, *Maniac*, *Carrie* – and horror films about motherhood in the 1990s and at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century that directly pertains to the way that discourses of motherhood are expressed and negotiated: the more recent films are far more likely to have mothers as their protagonists and to emphasise the mother's subjective experience.

This necessarily shifts the focus from the child-centric parent-child relationship to an exploration of the pressures of and competing messages about motherhood and how best to mother. The mother is presented less as the psychological root of an individual's problems and more as a type of inefficient gatekeeper against the horrors of the outside world.<sup>16</sup> I argue that these mother-centric narratives are influenced by the contradictions and anxieties that result from escalating standards of mothering (Medina and Magnuson 90) and the popular (and wholly impossible) notion that the hard-won victories of second wave feminism mean that women can (and, perhaps, owe it to their feminist forebears) to 'have it all'. This dictum suggests that women can achieve a perfect, fulfilling and guilt-free balance between essential and ideal motherhood and

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<sup>16</sup> In a recent example from the United States, non-normative motherhood is sometimes demonised in blatant ways; in March 2012, a Senate Bill sponsored by Republican Senator Glenn Grothman from Wisconsin would, if passed into law, identify "nonmarital parenthood as a contributing factor to child abuse and neglect" ("Sen. Grothman introduces bill that would label single-parenthood as contributing factor to child abuse").

employment outside the home even though, as Sondra Medina and Sandy Magnuson outline in their excellent 2009 discussion of pressures facing mothers in the United States, working outside the home inherently contravenes the lofty standards expected by modern hegemonic ideologies of mothering. Further, a devotion to home and family can impact upon the woman's ability to fulfil the expectations of her employer (91)<sup>17</sup> – all of which can result in guilt, judgment (from both self and others) and a feeling of failure. As they state, "Either way, mothers in professional careers are not meeting social expectations" (92), let alone those mothers who are working outside of white collar 'professions', or who hold down multiple jobs.

### THE 'HORROR' OF THE SINGLE MOTHER

This imperative to conform to the normative construction of ideal motherhood is made apparent through the prominent visibility of single mothers in recent horror films that emphasise mothers and motherhood. Single mothers, or those who parent apart from the child's biological father out of choice or necessity, have been visible in horror films at least since *Psycho*, but films in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century have shown a particular fascination with solo motherhood and the changes to the 'traditional' (white, middle class, heterosexual) nuclear family. Anglophone supernatural and gothic horrors *The Sixth Sense* (Shyamalan US 1999), *The Others* (Amenábar US-SP-FR-IT 2001), *The Ring* (Verbinski US-JAP 2002) and *Dark Water* (Salles US 2005), as well as the film adaptation of the survival horror video game *Silent Hill* (Gans CAN-FR-JAP-US 2006) and the psychological horror *Triangle* (Smith UK-AUS 2009) are critical of single mothers, positioning them as a source of danger, either explicitly or implicitly, even if the narrative itself is the woman's quest to save her child(ren) from a larger threat. As film scholar John Lewis wryly suggests, these films imply that the so-called "life choices" made by the mothers in each film "can be interpreted as catalysts for horror... by presenting the viewer with the 'horror' of the ineffectual or monstrous single parent". Here, the neoliberal and individualistic rhetoric of "choice" tidily erases all manner of systemic social and economic inequalities through the act of mother-blaming. This marks the mothers as inherently culpable and dangerous to their children in a way that

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<sup>17</sup> Medina and Magnuson also indicate that such expectations of motherhood increasingly undermine steps towards gender equality, in particular, more active, invested parenting by men (91).

the fathers, present or absent, are not, in large part because of their transgressive deviation from strictures of historically specific, ideologically complicit ideal motherhood.<sup>18</sup>

This emphasis on maternal choices drives the 2002 English language remake of Japanese horror film *The Ring*. Rachel, an ambitious and hardnosed journalist, begins investigating a cursed video tape after the mysterious death of her niece; watching the tape, a short film containing disjointed and sometimes nightmarish images, sentences the viewer to die seven days later at the hands of the vengeful ghost of a young girl, Samara. Rachel's role as a single, working mother is integral to the story. Her young son, a withdrawn and serious boy called Aidan, is almost painfully self-sufficient, something attributed to his mother's frequent absences; the fact that he calls her by her first name rather than 'Mom' further marks their relationship as distanced and unconventional. Even though Rachel is still on good terms with Aidan's father, it is implied that it was her decision to keep and raise the boy alone, thus choosing to blatantly defy the hegemonic ideological prerogative to raise children within a normative nuclear family structure. Aidan never finds out his father's identity and when the father succumbs to the tape's curse there is an overwhelming yet unspoken sense of loss, especially at the relationships that might have been had Rachel been less driven and single-minded. Indeed, this feeling of melancholy permeates the film, and is exacerbated through the frequent presence of shadows, rain and water,<sup>19</sup> as well as pronounced colour correction that imbues the film's images with blues, greens and greys. Rachel's obsession with her work leads her to bring the cursed tape home, where Aidan watches it, and the remainder of the film is about her attempts to solve the mystery of the tape's

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<sup>18</sup> It is important to note that this mother-blaming is not a recent phenomenon, even over and above the Freudian emphasis on maternal pathology. In *Mom*, Rebecca Jo Plant charts not only changes in mothering styles and ideologies in the twentieth century United States, but the way that such changes are if not driven by then at least accompanied by seemingly perpetual criticism of mothers and styles of motherhood. For example, in her discussions of the critique of suburban motherhood in Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, Plant notes that in the "1960s, many middle-class mothers, regardless of their employment status, felt condemned by a culture that subjected them to unremitting criticism" so that even as more women were entering the workforce, "many of the working mothers who wrote to Friedan still felt marginalized by a culture that lauded homemaking as the ultimate source of feminine fulfillment [sic]" (138).

<sup>19</sup> This is also related to the original Japanese film's association of Sadako, the ghostly antagonist, with water, an alignment between spirits, memory and water that is also loosely present in the American versions of *Dark Water* and *The Grudge* (Shimizu US-JAP 2004). However, the more nuanced and culturally specific aspects of the association between water and the underworld in Japanese ghost stories (*kaidan*) are not overtly articulated in the American films: see James Wierzbicki's discussion of cultural context and appropriation in J-horror remakes.

origins, save both herself and her son from death, and atone for her maternal negligence. Rachel's wish to 'have it all' and keep her career as well as her son is shown to have deprived her son of a father, as well as possibly dooming them all to an horrific death.

While Rachel is presented unsympathetically as a selfish and ineffective mother, she is not the only transgressive maternal figure of the film. The tape's ghost, Samara, is revealed to have been a disturbed and poisonous young girl with apparently supernatural and psychic powers. The family's doctor tells Rachel that Samara's mother, Anna, was unable to bear children, and that Samara had mysterious origins: "one winter they went away, [and] when they came back it was with Samara, adopted they said, never said from where; said the mother died of complications. But they had their baby..." However Samara would make those around her see things, "horrible things, like they'd been burned inside her", and after a series of terrible events, Anna pushed the child down the well and left her to die, before killing herself. Rachel remarks, "she wanted that child more than anything in the world. How could she have done that?" – but the film's irony is that this accusation is just as applicable to Rachel herself. Like Rachel's choice to raise a child by herself while working a demanding job, Anna's choice to have and keep a child, despite her infertility, is framed as her downfall. As Anna's husband later tells Rachel, Anna subverted the natural order: "my wife was not supposed to have a child!" *The Ring's* attitude towards both mothers is deeply cynical: both are punished for trying to conform to essential motherhood, specifically the notion that they should be mothers, and for both, motherhood is deeply challenging and far from an innate skill.<sup>20</sup>

In 2006's *Silent Hill*, as in *The Ring*, it is the mother who puts her child in danger – however, in this case essential motherhood is marked as irrational, and rather than

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<sup>20</sup> Sarah Arnold offers a cogent comparative analysis of the discourses of motherhood operating in the Japanese (*Ringu*) and American versions of the film, as well as the Japanese and American versions of the film *Dark Water*. She notes that the Japanese films privilege a nuanced maternal perspective while the American films highlight maternal incompetence, so that mother blame is more common in the American films; see chapter five, *Maternal Horror Film*. Valerie Wee, in her excellent comparative study of the aesthetics of the cursed videotape in the Japanese and American films "Visual Aesthetics and Ways of Seeing", also highlights how the origin of the vengeful spirit changes: in the Japanese original the girl, Sadako, received psychic powers from her birth mother, who later committed suicide, and it was the father, not the mother, who murdered the girl and put her down the well in a patriarchal suppression of feminine supernatural power. The *Ringu* series has numerous entries across various media and countries and a sprawling mythology that is not entirely reflected in the American remakes; Denis Meikle's *The Ring Companion* offers a broad analysis, although his opinion of the American remakes is poor.

featuring a single mother, we are shown a woman who decides to ignore her husband's wishes. Christopher and Rose's adopted daughter Sharon experiences night terrors during which she shouts "Silent Hill", the name of a foreboding and mysterious ghost town where a coal seam fire has been raging for decades. They are a warm and loving family unit, and Christopher insists that they can work through things together. He wishes to deal with their daughter's problems scientifically and rationally, through psychiatry and medication. Conversely, Rose instead decides to abscond with the girl and take her back to Silent Hill to confront the root of her trauma, something she sees as her maternal duty and, perhaps, as 'proof' that she is Sharon's real mother, despite their lack of blood relation.

As sociologist Barbara Katz Rothman suggests, there is a contradiction between the fact that while "patriarchal kinship is the core of patriarchy" (89) and an agnatic view of kinship is *de rigueur* in many western societies, the mother has a disproportionately privileged emotional and psychological access to the child. In *Silent Hill* this access, and Rose's decision to prove her maternal worth to her adopted child in violation of her husband's wishes, are shown to have terrible consequences. Rose crashes her car just outside of Silent Hill and when she regains consciousness the town is desolate, shrouded by fog and falling ash, and her daughter is gone. The film charts both Rose's dangerous quest to "face the darkness of hell" and rescue her daughter from monsters and an evil cult, and Christopher's frantic attempts to find them, although we soon realise that 'his' abandoned, quotidian Silent Hill and their dream-like, monstrous one exist in parallel universes. When Rose and Sharon finally return home, they are no longer in the same brightly-lit world as Christopher; they all inhabit the same house, but they cannot communicate with or see one another. While the film emphasises the strength of love between a mother and her child – "mother is God in the eyes of a child" is a repeated phrase – Rose demonstrates how quickly the idealised self-sacrifice of the 'good' mother becomes framed as dangerous, irrational and rash. Despite having saved her adoptive daughter and solved the mystery of Silent Hill, by acting apart from the rational father figure and challenging his paternal authority she has condemned herself

to a misty purgatory and irrevocably torn apart their previously happy, normative nuclear family.<sup>21</sup>

### **TRIANGLE: MATERNAL ATONEMENT AND PERPETUAL PUNISHMENT**

While the exploration of what it is to mother well and appropriately is important to both *Silent Hill* and *The Ring*, the 2009 psychological horror film *Triangle* offers a far more blatantly pointed engagement with questions of what it is to be an ideal mother, particularly as it relates to single mothers, through a story that invokes a cycle of domestic abuse, maternal guilt, and atonement. It is convoluted but tightly plotted, and given its intricacies, and the fact that it has to my knowledge received no scholarly attention, it is worth unpacking in detail. Jess, a waitress and a single mother to a young autistic boy, Tommy, is shown to be doing the best she can under challenging circumstances. She is invited on a yacht trip by Greg, a customer of hers who is perhaps romantically interested in her, along with some of his friends, although she appears to feel immense guilt at the prospect of leaving her son behind. The yacht capsizes during a freak storm and they manage to escape onto an eerily deserted passing cruise liner. However, Jess experiences profound *déjà vu*. Soon the group are terrorised by a masked killer, and only Jess evades death. After a series of altercations the figure tells Jess to “kill them all” if they board, and after Jess pushes the killer over the side of the boat she turns to see her own upturned yacht approaching the ship: she is in a Möbius strip-like time loop, there are three iterations of her running around the ship – recalling the name of Greg’s yacht, the *Triangle* – and everything that has happened to her has happened

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<sup>21</sup> This is similar to J. A. Bayona’s 2007 Spanish-Mexican film *The Orphanage* (*El orfanato*). Laura, who has reopened an old orphanage, spends the majority of the film hunting for her sickly adopted son Simon while being terrorised by a ghostly masked child. Laura transcends the barrier between life and death to try to save her son; however, in the film’s final scenes, it is revealed that she inadvertently trapped her son in a forgotten basement during a party, that his desiccated body has been lying under the house for months, and that the ghost child had been trying to alert her. Like Rose, Laura is not a single mother, but she becomes so single minded in her supernatural quest that her more grounded and rational husband is unable to cope and he leaves for most of the second half of the film. Finally, Laura chooses to overdose on tranquilisers so as to stay in the orphanage and look after her dead son and the ghostly orphans. Although the final shots insinuate that she may somehow return to her husband from beyond the grave, her suicide is framed problematically as a form of self-sacrifice: it is not selfishness, but rather a demonstration of the strength of her maternal instincts.

before and will happen, over and over again. The only way she can get home to Tommy is if she can do things differently and break the cycle.

Jess's increasingly desperate actions are futile and, when she realises that the time loop resets each time all her companions die, she becomes the killer she has been trying to evade. Each piece of violence is framed as an act of extreme sacrifice: for instance, after butchering her remaining two companions so as to make the upturned yacht reappear, she mutters "I'm sorry but I love my son". Finally, she is pushed off the side of the ship by her earlier self and washes ashore. She makes her way home where the opening domestic scenes of the film are revisited, but we are privy to further details: far from being a patient and gentle mother, Jess is frustrated, overburdened and cruel. After she sees herself hitting and swearing at her son she violently bludgeons her abusive self to death in the bedroom – the personal and sexual seat of the house – in a cathartic rage of self loathing. She plans to steal Tommy away from her 'bad' self, but he sees her crime. Instead, she stuffs her own body into the car's boot, coaxes the terrified boy into the car and drives off, promising that things are going to be different, saying "Mommy won't lose her temper any more, even when you do things wrong". However when she hits a seagull, then throws its body into a pile of identical dead gulls, she realises that she is still trapped in the loop. Tommy's distraught screaming at the blood on the windscreen distracts her and makes her lose her temper and she crashes her car, killing her son. Determined to do better and save Tommy from death, she stumbles away from the accident, reboards Greg's yacht, falls asleep, and wakes up, having forgotten everything, and so the punishing loop begins again.

The first way of interpreting this loop is optimistic: that a mother, confronted with her own failures and driven by both love for her son and the will to do better, can and will do whatever she can to make things right. Here Jess tries to live up to the impossible expectations of being an ideal mother. Like Rachel in *The Ring*, her identity as a single mother is frequently highlighted. Her situation is precarious: she works full time in a low paying and tiring job, while also caring for her demanding autistic son, who attends an expensive 'special' school. Further, she is struggling; 'bad' Jess lashes out and tells Tommy he is an "asshole", just like his absent father. Tommy is her life, for better or worse, and as *Sight & Sound* reviewer Anton Bitel notes, even her acceptance of Greg's invitation is a "momentous" step for her (80). When she tells Greg that she

feels guilty for not being with her son, he replies, “that’s because you’re a good mother – you can’t be a good mother all the time”. However, it is quickly apparent how fickle the construct of the ‘good mother’ is: when they are on board the liner, he implies that her sense of confusion and shock is because of her guilt and he accuses her of being irrational and “lost” in her own Tommy-centric world. This criticism of her all-encompassing devotion to her son paradoxically suggests that while a ‘good’ mother makes extraordinary sacrifices, a ‘bad’ mother’s sacrifice result in a loss of her sense of self.<sup>22</sup>

The line between the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ mother is increasingly indistinct, and this is made apparent through doubling in the camerawork, the *mise-en-scène* and the sound design. The cruise liner’s hallways form a confusing and repetitive maze.<sup>23</sup> Jess’s image, as well as the others’, often appears fragmented or repeated in mirrors (figs 5.2 and 5.3). At key moments she confronts either images of herself, reflected in cracked surfaces, or other actual iterations of herself, as if she is trying to understand both who she was and who she might be. Scenes repeat from different angles, emphasising Jess’s alternative perspectives on events, and at key points the camera travels ‘through’ a mirror to place the viewer in the subjective position of this ‘new’ Jess (fig 5.4). When Jess finally realises what is happening a record she is playing skips, which is supported visually through a sequence of repetitive and jarring jump cuts. In one obvious metaphor, her voice echoes around the ship, warning her companions (and herself) against her other selves. At several points Jess nearly kills one of her doubles, but each time the double’s protestation “I have a son” is enough to disrupt the killing blow, although when Jess kills her abusive self at home, it is just as *that* Jess has sat down in front of her bedroom mirror. The more committed she is to her goal of getting off the ship and back to Tommy, the more callous and violent she becomes.

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<sup>22</sup> It is worth noting that Greg is also a parent, of sorts: one of their travelling companions is a 19 year old who Greg had taken in and steered away from a life of crime, thus framing him as a ‘good’ and generous father figure.

<sup>23</sup> The faded glamour of the liner and its long confusing hallways bear more than a passing resemblance to those of the isolated, haunted Overlook Hotel in Stanley Kubrick’s horror film *The Shining* (UK-US 1980). This association is made concrete when Jess and Greg find a message written in blood left for them in room 237, a room of ominous significance in Kubrick’s film, which is home to the ghost of a drowned woman. Later, Jess butchers another one of the passengers there, providing the blood with which to write the message for her previous self. Jess’s house is also number 237, linking her home life with the horrors of the ship and hinting to the viewer that the loop is still in place, and the pattern of her home’s wallpaper recalls the geometric pattern on the carpet of the Overlook.





**Fig. 5.2. Repetition and fragmentation:** Greg's image is split and repeated by a mirror in the ship's ballroom in an early suggestion of the film's repetitive time loop (*Triangle*).



**Fig. 5.3. Three Jesses:** a triple image of Jess butchering one of her companions is reflected and repeated in the mirror of room 237, alluding to the three Jesses that are on board the cruise liner and the eventual death of the 'bad' Jess at the close of the film (*Triangle*).



**Fig. 5.4 The *döppelganger*:** after the deaths of her companions, a traumatised Jess considers herself in the mirror. Immediately following this, the camera passes through the mirror and follows mirror-Jess as she looks out to sea and sees the yacht re-approaching (*Triangle*).

The second, more cynical and fatalistic way of interpreting the time loop is that the cycle of abuse, regret and atonement will just continue and Jess, as a monstrous mother, is destined to fail. The story's tension is that of a woman at odds with herself, for while she is a mother who loves her child she is also potentially unfit to raise him. It is not stated whether or not Jess behaves violently specifically because of the stress of raising a demanding special needs child alone while earning a meagre wage, or if it is that she is someone who is already inclined towards anger and abuse, but it is clear that 'our' Jess sees herself as a good, even redemptive mother, and wishes things could be different. She tells Tommy that "that woman who did those things to you is not mommy. This is mommy. Mommy's nice" - a distinction that is also articulated by Nola in *The Brood*. However, every time Jess drives away with Tommy she passes a sign that reads "Goodbye – Please Return". This gruelling cycle is alluded to elsewhere. As the yacht departs, Jess tells Greg that with Tommy "every day's the same – if I do one thing differently I lose him". As Jess makes her way around the ship she stumbles across disturbing artefacts of her previous selves: hundreds of pieces of notepaper that she has left behind, hundreds of necklaces that she has dropped in the same place, and – most ghoulishly – hundreds of iterations of one of her companions, dead, all of whom have

dragged themselves to a far corner of the ship to escape Jess's rampage before dying. More subtly, a picture of seagulls on the wall of Jess's home is echoed by the way that seagulls seem to follow Jess from the land, to the yacht, to the liner (where they feast on the bodies of the dead) and back again.

Most tellingly, the empty cruise liner is named for Aeolus, the king of the winds and the father to Sisyphus, a man who was condemned to an eternity of rolling a boulder up a hill only to have it roll back down again at the last moment because, as one of Greg's friends summarises, "he made a promise to death that he didn't keep".<sup>24</sup> While this circular punishment can be read as any sort of guilty penance, Jess breaks two promises that frame her hell as explicitly couched in her role as a mother. The first is that after promising Tommy she won't lose her temper any more, she shouts desperately at him to calm down. In this manner the timing of the car accident is significant; Jess's distraction is caused both by her panic at realising she is still in the time loop and by her failure to mediate between being a kind yet firm "nice mommy" and falling back on her compulsion to yell at Tommy when he starts shrieking. The second promise is more metaphysical. After the crash, the way that the bodies are lying in the road suggests that the 'real' Jess was killed in the accident, and that everything after is a torturous loop that requires her to pay guilty penance for her maternal transgressions, suffering through the sacrifice she was unable to make as a living person. 'Our' Jess, bathed in a flat, portentous light, looks out across the accident and is approached by a taxi driver, who tells her that "there's nothing anyone can do that's going to bring [Tommy] back". The driver is framed as a Charon-like figure, a supernatural ferryman, but Jess chooses, as she always has, to be taken back to the harbour to try to find a way to bring her dead son back to life. She promises him that she'll return, and, pointedly, he assures her that he will keep the meter running. The implication is that it is her choice to perpetuate her torment, and that only by returning to the taxi, thus accepting her failures as a mother and her role in her son's death rather than trying to change the past, might she find peace. Instead, Jess is caught, forever, between her desire to be a good mother and her inability to fulfil this desire, and her punishment is to experience her son die over and over again.

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<sup>24</sup> Victor, one of the other passengers, declares this to be "a pretty shitty punishment".

Together, *The Ring*, *Silent Hill*, and *Triangle* point to a system of conflicting, contradictory and impossible expectations that, on one hand, police a particular type of nurturing, intensive motherhood, while on the other leave the sense that no matter what a mother does, it is never enough. Each of these mothers is challenged or punished for her desires, be they maternal or personal, and each is framed as at fault or culpable for the harm wrought upon their children and those around them. Further, each is shown to be unable to atone for her transgressions: Jess continues in her Sisyphean torture, Rose is trapped with her adoptive daughter in a melancholy purgatory away from her husband, and Rachel loses the father of her son and must pass the cursed tape on to an unsuspecting party or both she and her son will die. Overall, these millennial films indicate a great deal of anxiety over what it is to be an ideal mother and how one can mother appropriately given that, in the case of both *Silent Hill* and *Triangle*, extraordinary self-sacrifice, as befits the psychoanalytic and melodramatic models of 'good' motherhood, is never enough.

### **GRACE: COMPETING DISCOURSES OF MOTHERHOOD**

To recap, in this chapter I have so far argued that those approaches to motherhood in the horror film that are couched in psychoanalytic interpretive practices, particularly as they relate to the melodrama, fail to acknowledge that attitudes towards ideal and essential motherhood are complicated and often contradictory. Instead, I have considered how hegemonic discourses of ideal and essential motherhood are articulated, explored and policed in the horror film. In particular, I have suggested that while popular understandings of psychoanalytic discourses of motherhood are explicitly stated and critiqued in selected films from the 1970s, films from the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century are far more likely to deal with both the potential 'threat' of the single mother and the impossibility of fulfilling the paradoxical requirements of ideal motherhood. To close, I consider the 2009 film *Grace*, which has not received any sustained scholarly attentions, and which considers in great detail the nature of maternal self-sacrifice that is idealised in the melodramatic and psychoanalytic models of 'good' motherhood. *Grace* is unusual because it highlights the generational differences between two mothers. It also focuses on the dissonance between competing

discourses and philosophies of motherhood by showing these discourses to be culturally and historically specific constructs. However, in doing so, the film shows both mothers to be inadequate and inappropriate, thus framing the monstrous maternal as the inability – of any mother – to conform to the rigid (and monstrous) demands of ideal motherhood.

*Grace* offers a nuanced exploration of grief and maternal need. It focuses on Madeline, an upper middle class woman who is obsessed with organics, veganism, alternative medicine and clean living. She and her husband Michael have been desperately trying for a baby and finally conceive; however, the couple are in a car accident that kills both Michael and the unborn child. Against all advice, Madeline insists on carrying the baby to term and, miraculously, in the birthing tub the baby – Grace – revives and starts suckling. This moment of maternal bliss is short-lived. Grace, whose face is rarely shown, is not quite human: she smells unpleasant, her hair falls out when brushed, she bleeds mysteriously and she attracts flies. Grace won't digest breast milk, instead preferring the taste of her mother's blood. Madeline goes to extreme lengths to feed her "special" baby by deviating from her vegan diet to offer the child the juice from raw (organic, free range) meat, which gives the baby seizures, and then by regularly bleeding herself so much that she is left a sickly, anaemic wreck. Madeline's incredibly controlling mother-in-law, Vivian, starts trying to access the baby; she is a judge and moves to find Madeline incompetent so that she may take custody and fill the cavernous emotional hole left by the death of her son. As Madeline refuses to see her, Vivian sends her doctor to check on the baby, but, in desperation, Madeline kills him and tries to feed Grace with his blood, without success. Vivian arrives at the house to abduct the child but she and Madeleine fight and Vivian is killed. Madeline flees with Grace and in the company of her midwife and old friend Patricia they take to the road, framed as a latter day Thelma and Louise. However, the film ends with Madeline, even more pallid than before, announcing that Grace is teething, and revealing her breast to be bloody and gnawed through.

In comparison to the pregnancy films discussed in chapter three, *Grace* is unusual in that it grants Madeline near total agency over the conditions of her pregnancy and birth, despite the half-hearted protestations of her husband. Further, Madeline is framed, at first, as the ideal 21<sup>st</sup> century mother: she is white, educated,

middle class, married and financially unencumbered, and she actively chooses to have a child. However, the agency that Madeline exhibits is not framed as entirely empowering, and instead is undermined by the sardonic presentation of her and her husband's vegan lifestyle as narcissistic and self-indulgent, facilitated and enabled by their privilege rather than a legitimate concern for animals or the environment. Their affluence and the breadth of choices they have stands in stark, grimly ironic contrast to the fact that Madeline is incapable of providing for her child without in turn killing herself. Despite this privilege, as in *Triangle*, *Silent Hill* and *The Ring*, Madeline is the agent of her own demise: she insists on carrying the dead baby to term and seems to bring it back into life through strength of will, but her wish comes at a cost and she is doomed from the outset.

Madeline and Vivian are similar in that they are both strong-willed women with a great deal of agency, and as such I suggest they reflect a generational conflict between the maternal ideals espoused in the films discussed earlier in this chapter. This is indicative of the complicated and conflicted nature of discourses surrounding how to successfully mother. On one hand, Vivian's controlling nature, her job as a judge and her overbearing interference appear old fashioned, recalling both the appeal to authority encapsulated in the "scientific" model of mothering and childbirth between World Wars I and II (Plant 11-12), and the complicated mother-child relationships that were at the centre of popular understandings of psychoanalytic discourses in the 1950s and 1960s. This is emphasised through Vivian's choice of doctor, Dr Sohn; he carries a vintage Gladstone doctor's bag, and when he collects breast milk samples (for his own secret consumption) it is with an antique metal breast pump, an outdated, uncomfortable and invasive piece of machinery. On the other hand, Madeline is insistent that she is treated by Patricia, an old friend and former Women's Studies professor with whom she once had a very close, perhaps sexually intimate, live-in relationship. Madeline represents both a backlash against scientific mothering and an embodiment of a 21<sup>st</sup> century model that positions the pregnant woman as an informed consumer who is free to choose her medical provider – in this case, a provider whose holistic woman-centric methodology

draws from radical feminist critiques of the medicalisation of pregnancy, birth and motherhood.<sup>25</sup>

This ideological tension between holistic and scientifically mediated practices recurs throughout the film. An early scene, prior to the accident, establishes this hostility. Michael – who is less enamoured with the idea of alternative midwifery than his wife – asks Patricia for her credentials, emphasising his own need to see her as a qualified, authoritative figure that has been endorsed in a (western, scientific) manner he deems acceptable. She states she has a PhD in holistic obstetrics and “five years’ training in a dozen different eastern healing modalities”, but Michael is only satisfied when she reveals, stonily, that she also has an MD from Colombia University. Michael notes that he didn’t see any degrees hanging on the walls; Patricia responds that “the less this place looks like a hospital the better, there’s no reason to medicalise a *perfect* process” (my emphasis), invoking the dualistic distinction between the beauty of feminine nature and the hardness of masculine scientific rationality that is considered in detail in chapter three of this thesis.

Further, Patricia’s holistic practice is shown – at first - to be both more caring and more efficient than the strictly scientific alternative. Madeline is taken to hospital with suspected eclampsia and Dr Sohn intercedes at Vivian’s behest, demanding that the delivery be induced. When Patricia arrives she is furious at the hospital staff for allowing his intrusion, and she triumphantly finds that Madeline is only suffering from a gallstone, thus ‘rescuing’ her from an unnecessary procedure and putting Madeline-and-baby, rather than just the baby, back at the centre of care. However, later the film undermines this by showing Grace to be a child whose needs far outstrip the emotional and physical resources provided by Madeline and Patricia. At the film’s conclusion, Patricia indicates to Madeline that together they can keep both mother and baby healthy – “we can do this!” she states with determination and enthusiasm – before realising that Grace has already started eating into Madeleine’s breast. “She needs more now,” says Madeline in the film’s final line – more than both mother and doctor can provide. While mainstream scientific intervention is shown as impersonal, callous and

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<sup>25</sup> This tension is likewise evident in modern debates over the provision of maternity care. See Kerreen Reiger’s 2008 article “Domination or Mutual Recognition?” for a discussion about inter-professional tensions and the way that obstetrics and midwifery are positioned as Other to one another in both discourse and practice. See chapter three of this thesis for further discussions of the medicalisation of pregnancy.

sometimes brutal, particularly as it is embodied by Dr Sohn, the holistic approach is nonetheless incapable of dealing with the demands of her “special” child.

However, the tension between Madeline and Vivian’s mothering philosophies moves from ideological to personal, so that it becomes a hostile and toxic competition between two individuals as to who can mother the best. Thus, the film suggests that it is not that Madeline and Vivian are monstrous mothers; rather, motherhood *itself* is shown to be monstrous. In particular, Vivian becomes the cliché of the wicked mother-in-law, and her character draws from the filmic catalogue of villainous matriarchal figures, from *Psycho*’s Mrs. Bates, to Joan Crawford in *Mommy Dearest* (Perry US 1981), to *Now Voyager*’s (Rapper US 1942) Mrs Windle Dale; she is the phallic mother of the melodrama, threatening her son’s masculinity and emasculating her husband. She attempts to police Madeline’s body during the pregnancy, she is appalled at the idea that Madeline is using an alternative clinic and she greatly disapproves of Madeline’s veganism and the perceived effects it will have on the baby. Later, she shifts from passive-aggressive meddling to active, violent intervention: she spies on Madeline’s house, compels Dr Sohn to visit the baby and declare Madeline an unfit mother, and finally tries to steal the child herself. She distances herself from her son’s marriage to Madeline by denying Madeline’s status as birth mother, stating that she won’t have “this woman raising my granddaughter”, suggesting that her maternal right is stronger than that of Madeline.

The pathologisation of motherhood is not just evident through the bitter competition over Grace. It is also a struggle over the emotional ownership of Michael’s death, and it asks whether or not a mother’s need for her child outweighs any other emotional, biological or legal claims. This is something that predates the car crash; it is revealed late in the film that Vivian has kept Michael’s childhood bedroom, complete with his racing car bed, intact and untouched since he was small. We also learn that Vivian breastfed Michael until he was three years old, that is, much longer than is considered ‘normal’ in the majority of western mothering discourses.<sup>26</sup> Her grief at the loss of Michael appears to affect her in a more profound way than it does her husband,

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<sup>26</sup> For instance, in a 2013 study of breastfeeding continuation in the United Kingdom, health researchers Sally Downing and Amy Brown note that while the World Health Organisation recommends that mothers breast feed exclusively for six months and then in conjunction with other forms of nutrition until the baby is at least 24 months old, only a minority of women breastfeed for longer than a year, and those women who do so report that they are often alienated and ridiculed.



so much so that her fixation on Grace comes to supplant her longing for Michael. She announces, early in the film, that women can continue expressing milk past menopause, so long as the nipples are kept stimulated, and in a scene that borders on the grotesque in its lingering fascination with her private grief she retrieves her old breast pump. Staring at herself in the mirror she pumps at her breast and, despite being in her late 50s, her milk eventually flows freely. When we see her being sexually intimate with her husband it is with an agenda: she asks him to suckle on her breasts not out of desire, but so as to stimulate her nipples, an objective that she does not communicate to him (fig 5.5). This mirrors one of the film's opening scenes, in which Madeline and Michael have sex: Madeline looks to the ceiling, only mechanically engaged, as she focuses on the act of conception rather than the act of lovemaking. In both instances the sexual and emotional bond of the woman with the husband comes secondary to that with the child, real or perceived (fig 5.6).

While *Grace* both pathologises Vivian's behaviour and shows Madeline to be incapable of living up to the visceral demands of the child, I suggest that the film implies that essential motherhood – the notion that motherhood is a biological and emotional imperative that sits at the heart of the female experience – endures despite generational changes to discourses of motherhood. It is significant that Patricia is also a parental figure, of sorts. When she is introduced she is looking at a photo of herself, Madeline and Madeline's cat, Jonesy, which had been taken years prior. She clearly aches for something for while she maintains an air of control and dignity, she has been anxiously worrying away at a spot on her desk with her thumbnail. When she visits Madeline and the baby at home, she plays with the cat and reminds Madeline that they were once seen as their own little family, "Ma and Pa and Baby J", but when she reaches out to stroke Madeline's cheek she is firmly rebuffed. Patricia's own longing – for Madeline, for the bond that they had had before, and perhaps for a child – makes her so far involved that she loses perspective and ceases to make rational decisions. In the film's epilogue, Patricia seems to have finally found a place of happiness and denial as the three of them travel through empty country, until she discovers how terrible Grace's demands are.



**Fig. 5.5 Encouraging lactation:** Vivian initiates sexual contact with her husband so that he will suckle her, but discourages him from touching her elsewhere and does not reciprocate (*Grace*).



**Fig. 5.6 Encouraging conception:** Similarly, at the beginning of the film Madeline lies back, disengaged, with her eyes fixed on the ceiling until her husband reaches orgasm (*Grace*).

Patricia's longing for her own family unit with Madeline by her side blinds her to the grisly reality that they both face. The implication is that this new alternative family unit, consisting of the two women and the child, is also unable to fulfil the idealistic hopes of either woman.

## MONSTROUS MOTHERHOOD

Sarah Arnold suggests that "*Grace* situate[s] 'essential motherhood' in terms of corruption. In other words, the ideology of essential motherhood becomes horrific when pregnancy and resulting offspring are represented as monstrous" (167). However, I suggest that this emphasis on monstrous offspring ignores the wider issues in the film: instead, *Grace* shows women becoming *necessarily* monstrous through the demands of motherhood and through the compulsion to mother, such as in Madeline's choice to carry Grace to term. While it is obvious that both Vivian and Madeline are strong-willed and exhibit a great deal of control over their lives, their surroundings and their husbands, it is these attributes that are debased and warped through the rigours and demands of motherhood, as well as the desire to be a mother at any cost. The film's title offers a clue as to how to frame the women. As I suggest at the opening of chapter three of this thesis, with *Rosemary's Baby* the film's title serves to illustrate that even though Rosemary is the film's protagonist, her position as subject is decentred, if not eradicated, by her child and by the idea that Rosemary herself is little more than a physical vessel. The title of *Grace* reflects something different; Madeline retains her status as subject, but Grace becomes the film's *objet d'obsession*. The title asks us to consider not the child, who is rarely in frame, but the frenzied lengths that each woman will go to so as to care for or possess the child. It positions both women as evocations of the monstrous-maternal - literally, by the extremity of their actions, and figuratively, because none of the women is able to fulfil the impossible nonpareil of ideal motherhood. Despite the competing discourses of motherhood, they are all ultimately inadequate.

The discourses of ideal and essential motherhood, no matter their finer points and no matter the will or wants of the mother, wholly fail to acknowledge that being a

mother is emotionally and physically taxing, and not always pleasant. Psychologist Jane M. Ussher is worth quoting at length:

Not all women enjoy motherhood. Not all women find the changes that come with it bearable. The reality of motherhood, for many women, is stark; rage, despair and disappointment are not uncommon. But this is not the sign of monstrous femininity, and the body is not to blame. How many mothers can say, with all honesty, that they have not experienced despair in the months following the birth of a child? Absence of sleep, disruption of routine, putting the needs of the baby above those of all others (including self), hours of breast-feeding (or endless preparation of bottles), a baby crying – is depressed mood not an understandable response? (*Managing the Monstrous Feminine* 106)

Here, Madeleine's despair and the macabre and intensive relationship that she has with her inhuman child can also be read as a metaphor not just for post-natal depression, but for the necessary and perfectly reasonable pressures placed on any new mother.

Perhaps, then, the monstrous maternal can be reconfigured so that it is not that it stands for a mother's inability to conform to the socially and historically specific perfect mother that is invoked through the discourses of ideal and essential motherhood.

Rather, what is monstrous is the notion that a woman can and *should* be judged using a set of impossible criteria against which she will always be found wanting.

At the opening of this chapter I suggested that the discursive positioning of motherhood within horror films, and the way that horror films in turn articulate and recirculate discourses of motherhood, contributes to a broader management of the way that motherhood and the maternal are understood, disciplined, enforced and enacted. What I have demonstrated here is that while discourses of motherhood are culturally and historically specific, there is a pervading sense that mothers can never fulfil the implicit and explicit criteria against which they are judged. I find this profoundly troubling and insidious for, on one hand, the myth of essential motherhood implies that motherhood is at once innate, natural and desirable. On the other, the demands placed upon women through the struggle to fulfil the criteria of ideal motherhood suggests that women are nonetheless incapable of doing what allegedly comes 'naturally' and that they must instead conform to certain unattainable and ever-shifting standards of 'appropriate' motherhood, often through the intervention of third parties. Thus, the melodramatic model of the archetypal 'good' and 'bad' mother that is present through studies of motherhood in film in general - and in horror film in particular - fails to

acknowledge that both mothers and motherhood are ambivalently framed as always-already monstrous. The allusion to Sisyphus's impossible task in *Triangle* is apt, for the message to mothers in horror film is clear: you must do better, but you can never do enough.

There is one film, though, that attempts to negotiate a way through this predicament: John Waters' camp horror satire *Serial Mom* (US 1994), which lampoons the ridiculous standards of ideal motherhood. Its titular character, Beverly Sutphin, is a seemingly perfect white middle-class suburban housewife who harasses and murders anyone who she deems to have slighted her or her family, but her murder trial turns into a media circus and after successfully defending herself she walks free. *Serial Mom's* jaunty, tongue-in-cheek tone sits in opposition to its macabre content, so as to satirise the apparent respectability of 'all-American' family values and the lengths to which individuals and communities will go to prop them up - a continuation of the emphasis upon transgression, (bad) taste and the grotesque that runs through director John Waters' oeuvre. The film opens in a similar way to David Lynch's *Blue Velvet* (US 1986) and Mitchell Lichtstein's *Teeth* (US 2007), which is addressed in chapter two of this thesis: the establishing shots are of blue sky and a picture-perfect American suburban neighbourhood, images that exemplify a wholesome Americana whilst acting as a visual foil to the psychological rot that is shown to exist beneath the surface.

As in *The Killing Kind*, each of Beverly's murderous actions is instigated by a transgression against her family or her sense of respectability. Beverly - pathologically well-meaning - sees herself as an agent of change and someone who must right the behavioural deficiencies in others, be it chewing too much gum, being rude to her daughter or refusing to sort their recycling. The humour of the film derives from the juxtaposition of Beverly's homicidal acts with her overall demeanour, such that even while ripping the liver from a man with a fire poker, she is just as concerned about the mess on her hands and the state of her shoes as she is about making sure she has killed him. This dissonance also highlights how the enforcement of white middle-class respectability is inherently bound up within the construct of ideal motherhood; immediately following her acquittal she bludgeons to death a juror who, while wholly on her side, was wearing white shoes after Labor Day - something considered a fashion faux pas.

By the time of her high-profile trial, which presciently predated the highly publicised and media saturated O.J. Simpson murder trial in the United States by a year, Beverly's identity is constructed through competing discourses of motherhood and madness. In his closing statements the prosecuting attorney announces that "she is not a woman, she is a monster", stripping her of her humanity and gender. Meanwhile, Beverly's family wonder if this homicidal behaviour is down to Beverly reaching menopause; "your mother may have some problems, that's all," says her nervous husband Eugene, and later, "no matter what your mother is we'll love her anyway."<sup>27</sup> However, the cultural script of the monstrous maternal is re-written and Beverly defends herself successfully by drawing upon her aura of respectability and homeliness. In a brief cameo, actress Suzanne Somers, who has signed on to play Beverly in an upcoming film, announces to the gathered press that Beverly is "a *normal* housewife trapped in a nightmare of circumstantial evidence" (my emphasis) and should be considered a "feminist heroine"<sup>28</sup> – an ordinary woman who, like wives and mothers everywhere, is subjected to enormous daily pressure. (One of the housewives gathered outside the courthouse comments that she feels like killing a couple of people herself.) *Serial Mom* manages to highlight the outlandish expectations of ideal motherhood in a way that is playful, absurd and palatable: the film indicates that perhaps the only way to adequately fulfil ideal motherhood is by embracing psychosis and monstrosity, because the construct of the ideal mother is, itself, monstrous. In the following chapter I consider ways of reframing such monstrosity.

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<sup>27</sup> As Jane M. Ussher notes, "Moral insanity due to menopause" has been accepted as a legal defence in a number of cases, both in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and more recently (*Managing the Monstrous Feminine*, 128).

<sup>28</sup> John Waters stated in an interview in 1994, "I wish my own mother had done that, basically. But I think everybody wishes that their moms would come to the rescue. *Serial Mom* is a good mom. I don't think of her at all as a villain of this movie. She's the heroine" (J. Grant 128).

## CHAPTER SIX: (RE)PRODUCTIVE BECOMINGS

### A SCHIZOANALYSIS OF THE ALIEN TETRALOGY

*These feelings are ancient and  
naked mole rats.*

*Conditioned to darkness and not feeling pain. You can try to stop them but they  
keep on digging with their teeth for the tubers to feed their queen. Sigourney  
Weaver is my queen in the eusocial utopia of my dreams.*

from "Sigourney Weaver Helps Me Out of Some Feelings (Not Pants)"  
(Barnes)

Over the course of the previous five chapters, and despite a variety of theoretical approaches, my discussions of corporeality, virginity, pregnancy, reproductive technology and motherhood have reflected how deeply embedded binary models are within western thinking. This dualistic paradigm takes many forms – the self *or* the other, the pregnant woman *or* her foetus, the chaste virgin *or* the predatory *vagina dentata*, and the inside *or* the outside – but all are relationships that are based not just on opposition, but on the active rejection of something. Likewise, the dominant modes of horror scholarship, as outlined in chapter one, often rely (at least in part) upon such dualisms as the acceptable 'clean' and the taboo 'unclean'; for example the abject, which informs so many horror theories and critiques, is that which disrespects (and thus implicitly reinforces) borders and which might then be contained. This demarcation and policing of boundaries, as well as the inferred enforcement of a hierarchy based upon discrete entities is, I suggest, a limiting factor in the study of horror. This is particularly so as horror itself is a genre and an aesthetic that offers enormous potential for the sort of re-inscription of sensation, the body and the nature of the subject that embraces the expansiveness and connectivity that is evoked by the piece of poetry I open the chapter with above. So, in this chapter I look to a profoundly different theoretical paradigm, one

that prioritises the inclusive term ‘and’ over the divisive term ‘or’: the process of ‘schizoanalysis’, as presented by French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in their expansive and experimental co-authored 1980 work *A Thousand Plateaus* (henceforth ATP), which follows their 1972 book *Anti-Oedipus* as the second volume of *Capital and Schizophrenia*.

The term schizoanalysis originates in Deleuze and Guattari’s critique of Freudian psychoanalysis, particularly the Oedipus complex, and what they see as its relationship to both the strict pathologisation of ‘deviancy’ and the bolstering of systems of capitalism, repression and social control. Instead, they look to a ‘materialist psychoanalysis’ that they call ‘schizoanalysis’, which celebrates the anarchic figure of the ‘schizo’ (which is distinct from the illness schizophrenia) rather than trying to fix the neuroses of the ‘psycho’. As they state in the introduction to *A Thousand Plateaus*, psychoanalysis:

bases its own dictatorial power upon a dictatorial conception of the unconscious. [...] Schizoanalysis, on the other hand, treats the unconscious as an acentred system, in other words, as a machinic network of finite automata (a rhizome), and thus arrives at an entirely different state of the unconscious. (19)<sup>1</sup>

I argue that Deleuze and Guattari’s immanent philosophy has a great deal to offer to both the study of horror film and to a feminist appraisal of gender and reproduction, for it promotes a radical reconsideration of the relationship between bodies, power, aesthetic and affect. Over the course of this chapter I will demonstrate the use-value of this approach through a close-grained schizoanalysis of the *Alien* tetralogy: *Alien* (Scott, UK-USA 1979), *Aliens* (Cameron, USA 1986), *Alien<sup>3</sup>* (Fincher, USA 1992) and *Alien: Resurrection* (Jeunet, USA 1997). These four films, which feature Sigourney Weaver as the protagonist Ellen Ripley, blend science fiction, action and horror with a prominent dis-ease about the nature of subjectivity, motherhood and monstrosity. I assert that, as a whole, the series is driven by a conflict over the control and the mechanics of reproduction, be it an organic, embodied process or a clinical scientific one. This is emphasised through the extensive use of character and set designs by Swiss surrealist artist H. R. Giger, whose artwork combines both ambiguous and explicit allusions to

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<sup>1</sup> See Brian Massumi’s translator’s foreword to *A Thousand Plateaus* (ATP ix-xvi) for further context, including a discussion of Félix Guattari’s background and training in Lacanian psychoanalysis, as well as his involvement in social activism.



genitalia with a biomechanical aesthetic, a relationship that he terms “a dialectic between man and machine, representing a universe at once disturbing and sublime” (“HR Giger – The Official Website”). So, from here, I start by considering the films themselves and by outlining some key aspects of Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophical paradigm, before finally exploring a possible way that theory and film might meet.

## ANALYSING THE *ALIEN* TETRALOGY

The *Alien* franchise includes the four ‘core’ films as well as revisionist crossovers that merge film franchises by pitting the alien ‘xenomorphs’ against alien Predators,<sup>2</sup> a loose prequel (*Prometheus* (Scott UK-USA 2012 )), and graphic novels, novelisations, computer games and other merchandise. At the centre of each core film is Lt. Ellen Ripley, who in *Alien* is the warrant officer of the Company-owned commercial mining ship *Nostromo*. The core films’ names refer to the antagonists of the series – parasitic, eusocial creatures that in adulthood are large and aggressive, usually bipedal, with an elongated skull, a long segmented tail, acidic blood and a somewhat biomechanical appearance. Throughout this analysis the xenomorphs – a term taken from the Greek for ‘strange’ (*xeno* - literally ‘alien’) and ‘shape’ (*morph*), and first used in *Aliens* – will often be referred to as the Alien. This is partly for the sake of clarity, for the Alien takes a number of forms throughout the films; over the course of its life cycle it develops from an egg, to a larval form (the ‘face-hugger’) that attaches itself to its host’s face to implant an embryo, to a juvenile form (the ‘chest-burster’) that violently erupts from its host, to its adult form, which takes on some of the physical and genetic attributes of its host body. However, the use of the singular term ‘Alien’ is also to acknowledge that the Alien is as much a unified force and a concept as it is a collection of individual entities or a pack.

Before I explore the interactions and encounters between the Company, the Alien and Ripley, it is worth briefly outlining the key events in each film. In *Alien*, the *Nostromo*’s crew are woken up from stasis by a distress signal in an alien language, and

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<sup>2</sup> The appearance of an Alien head as a hunting trophy in the science fiction action film *Predator 2* (Hopkins, USA 1990) was inspired by an *Alien vs. Predator* crossover story in a graphic novel anthology published by American company Dark Horse Comics, which has led to crossover films (and other media) featuring the Predators and Aliens, such as *AVP: Alien vs. Predator* (Anderson USA 2004) and *Aliens vs. Predator: Requiem* (Brothers Strause USA 2007).

they fly to the nearby planetoid LV-426 to investigate. An away team explores a massive, derelict spaceship of non-human origin in which they find hundreds of alien eggs, and a predatory, parasitic Alien drone is brought back aboard the *Nostromo*. First, in its larval form, it attaches itself to executive officer Kane's face and it incubates inside him. Then, it bursts from Kane's chest and rapidly matures into an adult. Science officer Ash – who is secretly an android in the direct employ of the Company – terms it a “perfect organism”, whose resilience and adaptability is only matched by its hostility. The rest of the crew are killed but Ripley manages to destroy the Alien as well as the *Nostromo*, in violation of the Company's orders to retain the entity so that it may be studied. The film ends with her entering stasis, hoping that she will be picked up by a passing ship.

*Aliens* is set 57 years later; Ripley's escape pod is found floating in space, and after she is revived by Company representatives she is blamed for the destruction in *Alien*. The planetoid from *Alien* is now being terraformed by the Company, but the colony has gone offline. Although she has been stripped of her flight status as punishment, Ripley is asked to accompany a group of space marines to the colony to investigate. Alien drones have wiped out the colony, except for a young girl called Newt, who Ripley befriends. The drones kill most of the soldiers, and Ripley successfully battles an enormous egg-laying Queen. She and the few remaining survivors escape, again in defiance of Company wishes to capture and contain the Alien. Once more, the film finishes as she enters stasis.

In *Alien*<sup>3</sup>, Ripley's escape pod crash lands on a Company-run penal colony and lead foundry; the other survivors, including Newt, have died in the crash. An Alien facehugger had smuggled aboard the pod at the end of *Aliens* and it escapes, incubates inside a prisoner's dog and then starts killing off the prisoners. Ripley discovers that she had been implanted during her stasis and is now incubating a new Queen. She and the prisoners kill the rampaging Alien, and as the Company arrive to collect Ripley, she throws herself into the prison's foundry, just as the Queen bursts from her chest.

*Alien: Resurrection* is set 200 years later on a scientific research vessel, the *Auriga*; the Company has successfully cloned Ripley and the infant Queen from DNA found at the penal colony's lead works, again with the intention of weaponising and

commercialising the Alien. Ripley 8 – the eighth clone, and the only stable iteration – retains aspects of the Alien such as heightened strength and awareness and acidic blood, just as the cloned Queen has ‘inherited’ a human reproductive system from her. Ripley discovers these previous clones and destroys them. The cloned Queen firstly births a host of drones, which escape and attack the ship’s inhabitants, and then a human-Alien hybrid, which recognises Ripley 8 as its mother. Ripley 8 kills this progeny and helps a band of mercenaries defeat the remaining Aliens by forcing the *Auriga* to crash land on Earth, while the survivors escape in the mercenaries’ small ship. The film ends with Ripley 8 looking out over Earth in contemplation, as she identifies her (new) self as a “stranger here”; this is the first film that ends without Ripley dying or falling asleep.

The four ‘core’ *Alien* films have received a great deal of analysis and criticism. Subjects of study have included the monstrous-feminine, abjection, the archaic mother and her generative power (Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine* 16-30); the series’ relationship to classical myth and the classical Hollywood woman’s film (Greven 117-139); humanism as ideological trope (Kavanagh); white, middle-class male anxiety about the radical nature of feminism (Newton); a psychoanalytic reading of *Alien*’s failure to adequately critique capitalism or promote feminism (Greenberg); maternity and the maternal body, from the perspective of subjectivity (Constable) ; and queer theory, deviance and the notion of ‘excessive sameness’ (Stacey, “She is Not Herself”). Roz Kaveney devotes nearly a third of her 2005 book *From Alien to The Matrix: Reading Science Fiction Film* (129-204) to a close reading of the four *Alien* films, and C. Jason Smith and Ximena Gallardo-C. look at constructions of sex and gender through a take-by-take analysis of the films in their 2004 book *Alien Woman: The Making of Lt. Ellen Ripley*.

Such critical discussion has often focussed on the relationship between Ripley and the Alien’s various guises, and what these characters and relationships may represent. This tends to position Ripley in relation to an alien Other, and this can offer a rich conceptual space in which to consider the nature of the human and the non-human, and the female form (as action hero, as mother, as survivor, as neutered). In the lead up to the release of Ridley Scott’s 2012 film *Prometheus*, which was fashioned as a loose prequel to the films, Tom Shone penned an article for Slate.com on *Alien* and gender

subtitled “Why are academics so obsessed with Ridley Scott’s movie and its sequels?”, in which he outlines, somewhat snidely, the “cottage industry of analysis” devoted to the “termite-like deconstruction” of the film. However, it is *because* of the *Alien* films’ position as both quintessential examples of gynaehorror and fertile ground for scholarly appraisal that they are an ideal set of films to consider through a Deleuzoguattarian lens. The fact that these films have bred such a diverse abundance of analyses – some more successful than others, some arguing in opposition to one another – marks them as filmic, semiotic, aesthetic entities well suited to an approach that is concerned with concepts such as ‘mappings’, ‘tracings’, ‘assemblages’ and ‘rhizomatic’ growth.

## WAYS OF WORKING WITH DELEUZE AND GUATTARI

A study that looks to Deleuze and Guattari’s conceptual work offers a different perspective on the power relationships at play in the *Alien* series, in particular the power of control over reproduction or the capacity for reproduction, and the ability of individuals, groups or other ‘assemblages’ to challenge or even co-opt this power. A Deleuzoguattarian engagement with these films encourages both a critique and an exploration of the relationship between bodies of power and reproductive bodies. It also facilitates a more ambivalent, ambiguous and open reading of the relationship between Ripley, the guises of the Alien and the use and control of reproductive technologies than do other appraisals of the *Alien* films, let alone other horror films, such as those explored within chapter four of this thesis. This sort of reading allows for an engagement with the narrative attributes as well as the aesthetic components of films in a way that is not inherently informed by a study of fear or anxiety, as many readings of horrific texts are. Such an approach can be emancipatory, in that it looks to the possibilities, relationships and affects explored and evoked by the films, rather than a reading of strict or imposed representations. Most importantly, it is not bound by the binaries and dualisms – particularly self and Other and human and non-human - that are so often invoked in studies of horror and science fiction film.

This is not to say that the deployment of Deleuzoguattarian conceptual frameworks and reading strategies is unproblematic, particularly from a feminist point of view. Elizabeth Grosz (“A Thousand Tiny Sexes”) clearly outlines some of the feminist

suspensions towards Deleuze and Guattari's work in their precursor to *A Thousand Plateaus*, *Anti-Oedipus*, most notably French feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray's objections that the phallogocentric nature of the language sometimes employed by the theorists "utilise models and metaphors which have been made possible only at the expense of women's exclusion and denigration" (168). Grosz also cites feminist theorist Alice Jardine's complaints that concepts such as 'becoming-woman' and 'desiring-machines', which are discussed later in this chapter, are "merely male forms of appropriation of whatever is radical and threatening about women's movements" (167-8). However, Grosz posits that *A Thousand Plateaus* opens up a more useful set of theoretical and methodological tools than *Anti-Oedipus*, such as in its discussions of concepts such as rhizomatics, planes, intensities and cartographies, all of which will be approached later in this chapter. This is particularly so given Deleuze and Guattari's self-confessed interest in acknowledging yet critiquing and dismantling dualisms and the binary logic that sits at the heart of much Western metaphysical thinking. As Grosz notes, Deleuze and Guattari's:

notion of the body as a discontinuous, non-totalized set of processes, organs, flows, energies, corporeal substance and incorporeal events, intensities and durations may be of great relevance to those feminists attempting to reconceive bodies, especially women's bodies outside of the binary polarizations imposed on the body by the mind/body, nature/culture, subject/ object and interior/exterior oppositions. ("A Thousand Tiny Sexes" 170)

In the introduction to *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari advocate for intellectual calisthenics and conceptual cross-pollination by organising their chapters as 'plateaus'. Each plateau can be considered as "any multiplicity connected to other multiplicities by superficial underground stems in such a way as to form or extend a rhizome" (ATP 24). The rhizome dismantles hierarchies, for it is made up of multiple, heterogenic connections rather than singular positions: lines of 'becoming' rather than fixed, striated places of 'being'. Deleuze and Guattari frequently adopt and adapt terminology from a diverse range of other disciplines, such as psychiatry, music, chemistry, and geology; in this case the rhizome, like its botanical namesake, it has no fixed centre or point of origin. The rhizome is a map or matrix of entities, thoughts and ideas that can (indeed, must be) connected to anything other. It is multiplicitous and has neither subject nor object; it can never be overcoded; it is based upon ruptures, for the rhizome "may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on one of its

old lines, or on new lines" (ATP 10). A rhizome can in turn be considered as something that "ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences and social struggles" (8). Each plateau is a place of 'intensity', a resonance of polymorphous, generative and productive combination and continuation. Each is a place of positive inference, and Deleuze and Guattari are concerned less with what things are, but how they are connected and what they do. They state, "We have written this book as a rhizome. It is composed of plateaus. We have given it a circular form, but only for laughs" (ATP 24). Such flippancy is indicative of the way that Deleuze and Guattari undermine and trivialise fixed meanings, discarding them in favour of new and interesting combinations and connections.

In keeping with this sentiment, this discussion of the *Alien* franchise looks to use a combination of theoretical tools and concepts from *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus* in such a way that looks for new combinations, intensities, relationships and lines of flight so as to form connections between the films, their stories, characters, images, and shapes in a 'schizoanalytic' rather than a psychoanalytic manner. Deleuze and Guattari write that "Good and bad are only the products of an active and temporary selection" (ATP 10); in a more literary paradigm, "there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so" (Hamlet, II.ii.249-50). Therefore, this engagement with the *Alien* films looks to move beyond a critique that frames the character of Ripley as good / heroine / warrior / mother and that of the many Aliens as disruptive Other(s) / threat / invasive species / monstrous, a psychoanalytic reading that situates the Alien as Ripley's uncanny double or *doppelgänger*, so as to consider a more open and positive conceptual and visceral relationship between the possibilities of reproductive technology and the body, particularly regarding systems of power and control. This approach privileges what bodies can do, not what they represent. These bodies are not discrete entities; in Deleuzoguattarian terms they are assemblages and aggregates, productive combinations and types of relationships. They are not be-ings or closed systems that are defined by their identity - they are becomings and relationships that are perpetually in motion.

**SCHIZOANALYSIS AND / OF HORROR FILM**

As an analytic tool, schizoanalysis is pragmatic rather than abstract, for it exists to be actively put into practice. As Deleuze and Guattari's challenge to psychoanalysis, it "offers liberation from the splitting of subject / object and from the primal condition of lack" (Powell, *Deleuze and Horror Film* 18). Where psychoanalysis sees lack (insatiable, an external set of prohibitions, located within the individual) as the key to desire, like a hole that can never be filled, schizoanalysis sees desire as the primary drive, an affective and generative social force, an open set of potentialities, a productive well that flows and flows continuously, and that is not bound by or defined in relation to the individual or by sexuality. Desire is an open system, the substance from which both life and death emerge. Indeed, "desire is both life and death, for at a quite literal level, the death of this or that body is not at all negative" (Colebrook, *Deleuze* 2) for it is yet a creation of another form; a person may die, but their corpse (or their memory) may sustain new life and new generation through decomposition. Where psychoanalysis looks to interpret things, schizoanalysis is interested in *interrogating* them, through considering and realising abstractions (Buchanan, "The Problem of the Body" 86). In the study of film, schizoanalysis encourages one to engage with the moving image in a manner that is not bound by notions of representation, and that is open to new and unusual connections between components. Deleuze and Guattari say:

Schizoanalysis, or pragmatics, has no other meaning: Make a rhizome. But you don't know what you can make a rhizome with, you don't know which subterranean stem is effectively going to make a rhizome, or enter a becoming, or people a desert. So experiment. (ATP 277)

Such experimentation consists of considering forms of expression by analysing their 'regimes of signs' or semiotic systems. This analysis consists of four circular 'components'; these "bud and form rhizomes" (ATP 161), chains of potential and connectivity. As Deleuze and Guattari's schema is, like the rest of their work, presented in an idiosyncratically technical and verbose manner, I paraphrase, summarise and elaborate here at length (see ATP161-2):

- 1) The first component is *generative*: one must make a study of concrete mixed semiotics and their mixtures and variations, and make a tracing of these. Such a tracing is not a 'map', which is a generative constructive relationship (see ATP 13); rather it is a mechanical reproduction that charts points of structuration and blockage.
- 2) The second component is *transformational*: then, make a study of pure semiotics, their 'transformation-translations' and the creation of new semiotics. By making a map (rather than a tracing) of these regimes with the possibilities for creation, buds may form along the lines of the prior tracings.
- 3) The third component is *diagrammatic*: here, make a study of 'abstract machines' (that is, systems of relationships, intensities and breakages), and a consideration of semiotically unformed *vis-à-vis* physically unformed matters. This results in a diagram of potential and effective emergences of further abstract machines.
- 4) The fourth component is *machinic* : finally, make a study of the 'assemblages' - the multiplicitous entity-relationships that necessarily act "on semiotic flows, material flows, and social flows simultaneously" (ATP 25) - that put into force these abstract machines by semiotising matters of expression and physicalising matters of content.

So, where a more narrative-driven approach to analysis might ask what the *Alien* films 'mean', or what Ripley and the Alien may 'represent', the application of this sort of experimentation can facilitate the following, alternative questions: how might the semiotics of the film(s) be traced and mapped? How can form be considered content; that is, how might the aesthetic components of the film(s) contribute to an understanding of relationships? How might motifs be traced and charted, and how might their connections and relationships change (or not)? How might 'individual' characters – or even the nonhuman and the inanimate - be considered with regards to one another, in terms of relationships, allegiances, and behaviour, rather than in terms of fixed identities? What do bodies, or aggregate bodies, do? How do they function? How might abstract machines form, break, or combine?

The consideration of schizoanalysis in the study of film is fairly recent, for while Deleuze's books on cinema (1983's *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* and 1985's *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*) are immediately applicable to the form, function and history of film,



the analytical methods suggested in *A Thousand Plateaus* and *Anti-Oedipus* are not explicitly carried through these texts. In his 2006 article “Is a Schizoanalysis of Cinema Possible?” Ian Buchanan suggests that schizoanalysis is certainly applicable to film, in part because of the extensive use of cinema and cinematic imagery that Deleuze and Guattari employ in their co-authored works. While some dominant theories of cinema look to psychoanalysis and dreams, as is discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, Deleuze and Guattari use cinematic examples to explain how the state of ‘delirium’ is a way of understanding schizoanalysis; Buchanan argues, “What is on screen is delirium in person – what we see is always inside someone’s head and for that reason it looks and feels real even when it isn’t” (123). This delirium constitutes a “regime of signs that can be used to inaugurate a new kind of semiology of cinema not reliant on unhelpful analogies of the order that cinema is a “kind of language”” (143), for it looks beyond image as direct representation or statement and considers the impact of form-as-content. For instance, as Anna Powell suggests, the lurid colours, particularly reds, used in Italian director Dario Argento’s 1977 cult horror classic *Suspiria* aren’t just signifiers of the murderous intent of the film’s coven of witches, but are horrific in their own right; they “assault the sensorium in their perverse mimicry of the Disney cartoon spectrum” (*Deleuze and Horror Film* 142) as they spread throughout the *mise-en-scène*, infecting and enveloping people, interiors, and buildings. As such, schizoanalysis can offer new ways of engaging with image from the perspective of film theory, but it also allows space for broader interactions between image, aesthetic, concept and technology.

Anna Powell advocates strongly for the use of schizoanalysis in the study of horror film and horrifying texts, and is the only writer to have explored this area in any great depth. In her 2005 book *Deleuze and Horror Film* she engages in valuable exploratory work in terms of connecting genre, film, and Deleuzoguattarian theory; this work is broadened in her 2007 book *Deleuze, Altered States and Film*, which looks at a wide variety of mainstream and art house cinema as well as conceptualising the act of viewing film as, itself, an altered state. She argues that as a dynamic concept that moves away from personal subjectivity, schizoanalysis proves itself to be “helpful to explore the sensory affect of horror film as experience rather than allegory” (*Deleuze and Horror Film* 3). Given the emphasis upon the malleability (or, penetrability) of the body in horror film, this attribute likewise renders schizoanalysis appropriate to consider topics

such as the intersections of power and technology with the body, such as reproductive technologies, for it begs a consideration of the reproductive body as part of a broader assemblage. As Verena Andermatt Conley notes, with regards to the study of technology, “Deleuze makes clear that machines are always a part of a collective assemblage and in that way can be understood to express social forms that give birth to them” (32).

The abstract machines created through image, affect and experience, as well as through the consideration of ‘individual’ characters and systems of power, can also offer a new way of physicalising content, be that content conceptual, virtual, philosophical, or relational. For instance, Powell suggests that David Cronenberg’s *The Brood* (CAN 1977), which I discuss in the previous chapter, is better understood through a schizoanalytic understanding of the film as a “map of the body in which mind and flesh form a transformational assemblage of force” (*Deleuze and Horror Film* 14) rather than by “replicating traditional images of madness” (*Deleuze and Horror Film* 14-5) through a more traditional psychoanalytic reading. As such, she suggests that “madness in horror may be read in a more positive light” (*Deleuze and Horror Film* 23) – and so too can the manipulation and alteration of the body, for in this context, the body and the mind are not separate entities, but part of a “perceptual continuum” (*Deleuze and Horror Film* 22).<sup>3</sup>

Powell argues for an approach that is interdisciplinary and eclectic, one that interrogates affective engagement as well as philosophical thought (*Deleuze and Horror Film* 207). For example, she offers a reading of *Alien: Resurrection* that centres around the concepts of becoming and fluid identity; as she terms it, the film “conveys the horrors of a becoming enforced by genetic engineering as the tool of a military-industrial complex” (*Deleuze and Horror Film* 74). She reads Ripley as emblematic of not only gender difference, but species difference: “Ripley is both more than and other than human” (*Deleuze and Horror Film* 75). Powell notes that Ripley exists within an alien milieu, taking on alien movements and characteristics, and at one stage enters in an amorphous maternal-sexual-bestial coupling with an alien drone that ultimately produces a new human-Alien hybrid. However, as with other readings of *Alien: Resurrection*, Powell does not entirely take into account the fact that that the Ripley of

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<sup>3</sup> This sort of a continuum is also the case with some other radical poststructural accounts of and re-conceptualisations of the body; see, for instance, my brief discussion of Jean-François Lyotard’s *Möebius* strip at the conclusion of chapter one of this thesis.

this film is one of many Ripleys, and each of these Ripleys is not a 'pure' Ripley (should such a thing even exist within a Deleuzoguattarian schema), but a hybrid of Ripley and an Alien Queen. Certainly, Ripley takes on these animalistic characteristics, but such a focus on the "alien / Ripley dichotomy" (*Deleuze and Horror Film* 77) continues the assumption that there *is* an alien / Ripley dichotomy.

One of the only other published Deleuzoguattarian accounts of an *Alien* film comes from Deleuzean film scholar Teresa Rizzo, who breaks this dichotomous nature down somewhat in her discussion of *Alien: Resurrection* in her article "The *Alien* Series: A Deleuzean Perspective". Her reading looks to rethink the nature of film viewing and affective texts through Deleuze and Guattari's work. She is particularly interested in the nature of the film-viewer assemblage as considered through the lens(!) of *A Thousand Plateaus*, and the way that such thinking breaks down the binaristic relationship between viewer and film, for as she notes, "Deleuze and Guattari's understanding of the body is not so much interested in the ego but on the way the body decomposes and recomposes with every encounter" (332), including the viewer's encounter with film. I suggest that aspects of Rizzo's reading are problematic; for example, her blanket assertion that "in the *Alien* films, those characters whose bodies and identities are open to change survive the longest whereas those whose bodies and identities are fixed and stable die easily" (333) serve to bluntly misconstrue details of plot and character in such a way that makes them fit her hypothesis, rather than letting such details inform her analysis. However, Rizzo's account of the fleshy, writhing signifiers of bodily deconstruction and reconstruction in the opening credits of *Alien: Resurrection* clearly connects the aesthetic of the film, the viewer's affective and corporeal experience and the radical potential inherent in dissolution, for "without a fixed notion of the human" – or of the whole, pure body – "there can be no fixed notion of categories such as sexuality, gender, race and ethnicity" (334). She particularly notes the way that "normal human perception" (340) is broken down and played with through the use of editing and visual effects; the viewer's experience of the film is disoriented, as unfixed as the

fluid boundaries of the alien(s) and Ripley – a point to which I will return in my discussion of the third and fourth *Alien* films later in this chapter.<sup>4</sup>

Each of these Deleuzoguattarian readings focuses predominantly or entirely on the fourth film of the series, *Alien: Resurrection*. However, there is merit in looking at all four films as a single entity, ignoring issues of authorship between and within the films for this way the Alien tetralogy can be analysed a series of encounters between three entities. Although many of the readings above focus their attentions on a Ripley / Alien dyad, over the course of this chapter I argue that it is the relationship between the fascist Company (in its various guises), Ripley and the Alien (as individual and aggregate) that carries through the films and that forms the core of the films' conflicts – from the first meeting between an alien drone and Ripley in *Alien* to the survival of the Ripley-Alien hybrid clone #8 at the end of *Alien: Resurrection* 257 years later.

## MICROPOLITICS: MOLARITY AND MOLECULARITY

I suggest that the relationship between the Company, the Alien and Ripley can be considered through an exploration of their political networks and interactions – in particular, their 'macro-' and 'micropolitics'. Deleuze and Guattari consider the way that all things are 'segmented', that is, divided into constituent parts both physically and conceptually: "We are segmented from all around and in every direction... Segmentarity is inherent to all the strata composing us" (ATP 230). They frame segmentarity as "a laying out of territories, a substitution of spaces for places and territorialities, and a transformation of the world into a city" (ATP 233). In *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari consider segmentarity and the way power is exercised over segments through the articulation of three types of political interactions or 'lines', which I explicate here.

The first is the 'molar' line – a term borrowed from scientific terminology, where 'molar' indicates a whole body or a mass. Molar configurations are those wholes that are rigidly stratified and are constructed along binary distinctions, such as man / woman, public / private (Pisters 11) or mind / body (Massumi 112). Deleuze and Guattari

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<sup>4</sup> Rizzo continues her appraisal of the *Alien* series in her 2012 book *Deleuze and Film: A Feminist Perspective*, although her analysis largely stems from Deleuze's work on cinema rather than Deleuze and Guattari's work in *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.

consider rigid segmentarity in terms of a tree, a “knot of arborescence or principle of dichotomy” (ATP 234), for “Binary logic is the spiritual reality of the root-tree” (ATP 5), as opposed to the decentred nature of the budding rhizome. This rigid line implies a State apparatus (ATP 244), and those macropolitical entities that belong to the State, such as its civic bodies, are molar. For instance, the military, the bureaucratic engine of the government and the education system use (and are contingent on) strict structures and hierarchies. Institutions such as these that are connected to the governing or State apparatus exert and retain control through their appropriation, reterritorialisation or ‘overcoding’ of space through delineation and compartmentalisation – that is, through the drawing and enforcing of borders. For example, a linear and hierarchical education system that is structured and sponsored by the government relies on the passing of successive examinations or assessment blocks, which test the pupil’s understanding of a curriculum that is, in turn, imposed by the state itself, all of which is framed as a necessary preparation for participation in adult society.

The second line is a “supple line of interlaced codes and territorialities” (ATP 244) – the ‘molecular’ line, which “forms connections and relations beyond the rigidity of the molar line” (Grosz, “A Thousand Tiny Sexes” 176). Where the molar line is macropolitical, the molecular line is less visible and is concerned with micropolitics, those small interactions that may be invisible and individual instead of collective. Such molecular lines could be “the private thoughts one can have about certain structures in society [that] form the cracks in the system of the molar line” (Pisters 11), such as a bureaucrat’s frustration at the nature of her work, workplace allegiances between teachers, or a police officer’s personal enthusiasm for or reservations about the laws that they must uphold. Another might be a poet’s use of the ‘cut up’ technique, where texts are cut up and rearranged to make new ones, thus destabilising fixed signification and creating brand new relationships between letters, words, sentences and the reader. Another still might be a mutation in a piece of genetic code, the spread and shift of a virus, or the encounters between component parts in a larger assemblage or organisation. These molecular lines “map processes of becoming, change, movement, reorganization” and account for “both socio-political and micro-becomings, demassifying molar segments, creating overcoded territories, passages, or cracks

between segments so that they may drift and yet [sic] something pass between them” (Grosz, “A Thousand Tiny Sexes” 176).

Molecular lines emphasise the act of ‘becoming’ over the state of being, because where molar lines rely on binary configurations, ‘becoming’ refutes them (Powell, *Deleuze and Horror Film* 10). Beings are fixed, but becomings are a necessarily dynamic and immanent (*vis-à-vis* a transcendent) transformative process, always pushing further into something new, or something else, by making new connections and alliances and creating new pathways. I suggest that such dynamism is inherent to the very nature of horrific texts and the importance of change, transgression and alteration to such films, both in terms of narrative and aesthetic. Becoming is a process of generative movement rather than an act of imitation, “the dynamic movement of life between and through congruent singularities”<sup>5</sup> (*Deleuze and Horror Film* 66), for imitation presupposes that there is a fixed ‘essence’ or original that is being rearticulated. One’s becoming-cat, or becoming-vampire, or becoming-anything does not result in a literal specific transformation into or imitation of that thing.<sup>6</sup> As Deleuze and Guattari argue:

Becoming produces nothing other than itself. We fall into a false alternative if we say that you either imitate or you are. What is real is the becoming itself, the block of becoming, not the supposedly fixed terms through which that which becomes passes... The becoming-animal of the human being is real, even if the animal the human being becomes is not; and the becoming-other of the animal is real, even if that something other it becomes is not. This is the point to clarify; that a becoming lacks a subject distinct from itself. (ATP 262)

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<sup>5</sup> Singularities: that is, unpredictable points of tension, or “mad or transitory particles” (ATP 45) in an abstract or philosophical rather than a strictly scientific sense.

<sup>6</sup> There are other becomings, too, an infinite number, such as becoming-dog (ATP 285), becoming-dinosaur (Hickey-Moody 2009), becoming-cat (Powell, *Deleuze and Horror Film* 68-72), and becoming-cyborg (Land 2006). However, I suggest that some of Anna Powell’s descriptions of becomings in horror films in *Deleuze and Horror Film* are a little too literal and finite. For instance, Powell looks to the villain of the *A Nightmare on Elm Street* series, Freddy Krueger, an anarchic and disfigured child killer who kills victims in their dreams, resulting in their ‘real world’ deaths. Krueger manipulates the victim’s dream space and playfully embodies their subconscious fears, inserting himself into their dream-milieu in a manner that is inventive, invasive and (sometimes) cartoon-like. In her description of some of these scenes, Powell argues that Krueger “has become-metal, become-wall, become-tree, become-phallus, become-blood and become-corpse” (102). However I posit that Freddy Krueger’s shape-shifting is less about the creation of new congruences and is more about elastic imitation and the manipulation of the physics of dream space. “Becoming begins as a desire to escape bodily limitation” (Massumi 94), but Freddy Krueger, malleable dream demon, has already escaped physical bodily limitations. Indeed, when Krueger is pulled into the human world, he is as vulnerable as anyone else.

Becomings are rhizomatic and multiplicitous, rather than fixed and arborescent, for where the tree “is”, in that it “imposes the verb “to be” ... the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, “and ... and ... and ...”” (ATP 27). This ongoing production can be linked to ‘desire’, a material flow that is the continual production of difference (Jordan 134). A becoming isn’t an end or even a means to an end, nor is it systematic and linear (ATP 24); rather, each ‘plateau’ of becoming is a place between events that “marks a framed and sustainable block or moment of immanently actualized transformations” (Braidotti 120) – a change-event, or a snapshot of congruence. As Rosi Braidotti frames it, “The different stages or levels of becoming trace an itinerary that consists in erasing and recomposing the former boundaries between self and others” (119). This erasure and recomposition makes becoming an ideal way to consider bodily transformations and mutations in horror film, for it reframes ‘the body’ as an unstable category, and these shifts and metamorphoses as something generative rather than negative and threatening. As such, becomings are inherently risky, for they challenge bodily boundaries and can unsettle “a coherent sense of personal self”, but they offer the promise of “new forms of living” (Lorraine 183).

All becomings are minoritarian. Where ‘majority’ is a constant and assumes “a state of power and domination” (ATP 116) from which others may be excluded, becoming-minoritarian is the creation of difference, a “movement of de-identification” (Maratti 211). There can be no becoming-majority. A minority does not necessarily number fewer than the majority; after all, ‘woman’ is considered a minority, despite outnumbering ‘man’, as is the case with ‘non-white’ as compared to a ‘white’ majority (ATP 117). For Deleuze and Guattari, the most important becoming is ‘becoming-woman’. Certainly, this phraseology is problematic from the perspective of feminist thought, as I have indicated earlier in this chapter; as Anna Powell states, it “appears to recycle the essentialist binaries a political feminism has worked to explode” (*Deleuze and Horror Film* 72). However, the term ‘woman’ is deployed to articulate a relationship, and to consider something that is *other* than - or, more accurately, *different* to or beyond - (majoritarian) man and phallogocentrism and the binaries that those concepts imply and enact. ‘Becoming-woman’ is a process that thwarts ‘dualism machines’ (Lorraine 184) and is something that is instead open to becoming, and thus open to the production of difference rather than the repetition of the same. As Rosi Braidotti

phrases it, minoritarianism is “the transcendence of the linguistic signifier” (119), an attribute that positions it in opposition to Lacanian psychoanalysis and Oedipality (amongst other frameworks), particularly in its resistance of the “colonizing force of the molar system” (127). As Claire Colebrook argues, “If we really acknowledge that there is something like becoming-woman, then we acknowledge that there is something truly other than man: that human life is not dominated by the male ideals of reason, strength, dominance and activity” (*Gilles Deleuze* 104).

Although the molar and the molecular lines coexist, one is not privileged over the other. Rather than ‘either/or’, their relationship could be categorised as ‘both / and’, and Deleuze and Guattari note that “Every society, and every individual, are thus plied by both segmentarities simultaneously” (ATP 235). The “great binary aggregates” such as sex (i.e. man / woman) are not pre-formed independent entities but are made up of smaller molecular assemblages, for they “imply a multiplicity of molecular combinations bringing into play not only the man in the woman and the woman in the man, but the relation of each to the animal, the plant, etc.: a thousand tiny sexes” (ATP 235). The molecular and the molar are not distinguished by their size or shape, but rather what they do and by the “nature of the system of reference envisioned” (ATP 239). Claire Colebrook gives the example of ‘molecular experiences’ that “are then organised and extended into ‘molar’ configurations... Before there is a ‘child’ that relates to a ‘mother’ – before there are social selves – there is a pre-personal perception, the connection of mouth and breast” (*Gilles Deleuze* 82).

## **MICROPOLITICS: LINES OF FLIGHT**

The third line is the line of flight or the ‘nomadic’ line, the fluctuation of desire. These lines are unpredictable lines of escape from segmentarity, which manifest (or, perhaps, consummate) previously implicit or virtual connections, thereby creating new affective capacities. They are “lines of liberation. Lines of flight run where systems of molar and molecular lines break down or where something new comes into effect” (Jordan 132). As such, lines of flight break free from control, hierarchy and stratification and offer up the possibility of and potential for creative movement and transformation. Lines of flight are both the “rupture in the rhizome” and a part of the rhizome itself



(ATP10). They 'deterritorialise' in that they are the movement by which one leaves a territory (ATP 559), breaking its boundaries, but they may be 'blocked' and 'reterritorialised'. Positive lines of flight may be sparks of inspiration or serendipity, or moments of social change. Art (and the experimental practice and creation of art) is full of lines of flight; Stendhal Syndrome, in which an individual becomes so overwhelmed by a work of art or by an expression of the sublime that they are overcome by dizziness, hallucinations and palpitations, can be considered another such line of flight. Lines of flight may also be ambivalent: in the final scene of *Splice* (Natali CAN-FR 2009), which I address in chapter four of this thesis, it is revealed that scientist Elsa has become pregnant after being raped by a chimera that she had created through the combination of her own DNA with that of animals. Her scientific exuberance (and hubris) and then the violent, incestuous physical creation are both lines of flight and new but incompatible forms of living. Reterritorialisation occurs as Elsa's pregnancy is co-opted and 'bought' by the pharmaceutical company that she had initially worked for, a striated entity that had controlled Elsa's experiments and that now owns and controls her body and limits her agency, thus redrawing boundaries.

Anna Powell posits that the physical, mental and emotional experience of watching a horror film is a line of flight, brought about by the machinic connection formed between the aesthetic and affective qualities of the horror film and the viewer, which results in a new corporeal experience and a film-viewer assemblage (Powell, *Deleuze and Horror Film* 21). Such an appraisal also suggests a new way of considering the sensory, aesthetic and philosophical pleasures of horror film spectatorship. The French horror film *Martyrs* (Laugier FR 2008) ends with a line of flight, both in terms of the aesthetic and narrative of the film and the film-viewer assemblage. A young woman, Anna, has been imprisoned and tortured by a secret society that is devoted to the creation of 'martyrs', young women who through the ravages of exquisite pain might witness what lies beyond death. After an unspecified period of systematic abuse, Anna is flayed alive and hung before heat lamps, and she finally enters such a 'euphoric' state. In doing so, Anna ruptures, breaks free of the control of her captors and stratification of her body and her mind. Her destructive line of flight is visually represented first as a bright ring around her pupils, which then becomes a circular body of light, pulsating on an inky black background – a roiling star, accompanied at first by a low rumble and then



**Fig. 6.1: Rupture:** Anna's line of flight is visually expressed as a ring of light that becomes a pulsating star-like ball, before finally resolving itself as a bright circle around Anna's pupil (*Martyrs*).

by polyphonic electronic music – and then a return to the image of Anna's eye, which now regards (and connects to) the viewer directly (fig. 6.1). Mademoiselle, the leader of the society, describes this 'witnessing' – this martyrdom – as a state of transcendence, but it is perhaps better framed as a state of perpetual immanence, a new form of connectivity. The extraordinary immensity of this connectivity is such that when Mademoiselle asks Anna to tell her about it, Mademoiselle is so shaken by the answer that she shoots herself, after first instructing one of her companions to "keep doubting". This is a state in which Anna is hurtling towards becoming-imperceptible, a molecular becoming that sits at the end of all becomings that begin with becoming-woman (ATP 308). While Anna is all perception, she can no longer be perceived by her captors; she is gone.

This highlights one of the dangers of the line of flight, namely self-destruction – although in the ambivalent context of *Martyrs*, Anna's self-destruction is also a form of self-preservation, a release from perpetual agony and a way of blocking the will of the cult that has captured her. Further, the line of flight created by the cinematic viewing

event, by the machinic relationship between viewer and film, is one that is informed by the film's deep compassion for its victim-characters. Affective and physical horror is engendered in the viewer by the film's horrific imagery, in particular a rhythmic twenty minute long sequence of Anna's torture and degradation at the hands of the cultists, which undermines the viewer's sense of time through its combination of short takes and brief periods of darkness. This, in conjunction with the film's shocking and nihilistic ending, is coupled with the deeply sympathetic relationship that the viewer has been encouraged to come to have with Anna over the course of the film. In the first half of the film, prior to her capture, she proves herself repeatedly to be kind, empathetic and selfless, and her character's role as a point of identification has a significant impact upon the way that the violence is framed and received – that is, in a cold, joyless documentarian manner quite different to that of the gleefully gaudy gore of so-called 'torture porn' films such as those in the *Saw* or *Hostel* series.<sup>7</sup> As Anna is released, so too is the viewer; Anna's becoming-imperceptible is intertwined with the viewer's own sensory catharsis.

## THE COMPANY

These lines – the molar, the molecular, and the line of flight – and their interactions offer ways of thinking about the relationships, alliances and events in the *Alien* films that are less restricted by representation, signification and psychological interiority. Firstly, I argue that it is helpful to consider the Company as a molar entity. The term 'the Company' is first introduced in *Alien* as the corporate entity that owns the ship *Nostromo* and employs her crew, including Ripley. In *Aliens* the Company is explicitly introduced as the multinational mega-conglomerate Weyland-Yutani, an entity that has very close ties to the military; this name appears intertextually in other science fiction properties such as *Serenity* (Whedon US 2005) and *Avatar* (Cameron US-UK 2009), suggesting that these stories share a common setting or universe and that Weyland-Yutani's influence is wide and insidious. Weyland-Yutani is behind the terraformation of the planetoid LV-426 first visited in *Alien*, and in *Aliens* it is shown to be an entity that clearly privileges profit over people. Its colonies include non-civilian

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<sup>7</sup> In comparison, see my brief discussion of *Hostel II* (Roth US 2007) in the conclusion of this thesis.

settlements, such as the lead refinery / penal colony that provides the setting for *Alien*<sup>3</sup>. At some point in the 200 years between the third film and *Alien: Resurrection*, Weyland-Yutani is acquired and absorbed by a military conglomerate called United Systems Military (USM), and the action takes place on a USM space vessel.<sup>8</sup> While the capitalist entity in *Alien* appears to be a different to the entity in *Alien: Resurrection*, they are fundamentally the same, for they *do* the same thing – they draw boundaries, they control, they co-opt. The name of the Company does not matter; in different guises, it is still the Company.

The Company is explicitly associated with the State; it is a capitalist organisation that has a clear relationship with and perhaps command over the military (*Aliens*), and is referred to as directly linked to the government (*Alien: Resurrection*). Those who work for and with the company belong to strict categories and hierarchies. These may be the ranks on a ship, such as the command structure on the *Nostromo*, the military ranks of the marines in *Aliens*, or the defined relationship between the prisoners and their overseers in *Alien*<sup>3</sup>, or they may be the less visible but no less powerful categories of “employee” or indentured settler, people restricted and bound up by a lack of capital and a reliance on a system that does not care for them. As Tim Jordan notes, molar lines “stop any free flows of creativity by forcing them into categories” (132); even when Ripley’s testimony about her encounter with the Alien is dismissed as nonsense and she loses her flight status at the beginning of *Aliens*, she retains her rank, and soon is given another work-identity (and, perhaps, use-value) as a loader operator. Indeed, there are few characters in the films who do not exist within or conform to some sort of Company-controlled or -articulated category. Only the mercenaries of the ship *Betty* in *Alien: Resurrection* do not exist within a space explicitly defined by the Company, but even they, as smugglers and traders, rely on the Company financially and have their own informal hierarchy.

The Company reterritorialises space, quite literally, by turning space detritus into mineral resources and through its terraforming programme, such as its plan to turn LV-426 from a hostile environment to one that may have some sort of commercial and colonial benefit. Its pursuit of the Alien is similar, in that the Company wishes to use it

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<sup>8</sup> In the DVD extras for *Alien: Resurrection*, a character suggests that Weyland-Yutani foundered financially and was bought out by American discount retailer Wal-Mart, which was then later acquired by the military.

as a resource, to stratify and control it – to ‘own’ it and to turn it into intellectual property. The Alien is external to the Company, and the “state’s relations to whatever is external to it, that is the state’s relations to anything that is not already territorialized, are those of capture and bondage” (Jordan 133). It is repeatedly stated that the company wishes to hand this “perfect organism” over to their bio-weapons division to make or facilitate the making of weapons, vaccines and alloys, or to ‘tame’ it and use it as a tool for urban pacification. The idea that the Company would want to use such a vicious and hostile creature to subdue populations indicates that at the macropolitical level it leans towards a state of totalitarianism, displaying “rigid segmentarity and a particular mode of totalization and centralization” (ATP 236) such that “it will attempt to submit all other activities under the consolidation of power ... at no matter what cost” (Busk 118). In this sense, the Company is an organism, inside of which everything (that is, each organ) has its own place and function.

Alongside the molar line of the Company are multiple molecular lines, micropolitical alliances and relationships. Such lines are evident in the blue-collar ship’s engineers Brett and Parker in *Alien*. They exhibit a good degree of class consciousness, they are aware of and resent their subordinate position, they gripe about their pay rates and they are deliberately obstructive to their senior officers, in particular Ripley. Early in the film, Brett pretends to be unable to hear Ripley over the venting of gas jets in the engine room, effectively thumbing his nose at her authority and claiming the engine room space as his own despite her more abstract authority over the ship by virtue of her rank. While both Brett and Parker are reliant on and motivated by their Company-given pay cheques, they use their skills and (un)willingness to comply with orders as leverage to ensure that they are not being treated unfairly, and regularly negotiate with the rest of the crew (although not always successfully). There are numerous such alliances, encounters and negotiations in *Alien*: Kane cockily looks into an Alien egg, opening himself up for parasitic infestation, an act of becoming-Alien; Ash breaks the rules yet acts at the behest of the Company as he lets the crew bring Kane’s body back onto the ship; Ash keeps secret his Company orders; Ripley decides to blow up the *Nostromo* to destroy the Alien; Ripley, while preparing the ship for self-destruct, decides to take the ship’s cat with her; Parker and Lambert attack and nearly destroy Ash (now revealed as an android and ‘Company man’) when he assaults Ripley, thus derailing the

Company's plans. The Alien itself runs along a molecular line, dissolving metal grates and panels with its acidic blood, hiding in vents and ducts, nimbly re-mapping the *Nostromo* to suit itself. Its power is in its defiance of the rigid segments of the Company, including physically, through its invasion of the ship. It picks off the crew one by one, and is rarely seen but often sensed by both crew and film viewer.

## FASCISM AND THE BODY WITHOUT ORGANS

While the Company acts in a totalitarian manner, it is better exemplified as a fascist organism. In his introduction to *Anti-Oedipus*, French philosopher Michel Foucault considers fascism as "the major enemy" – not just the fascism of Nazi Germany or Italy under Mussolini, but the "fascism within us all, in our heads and in our everyday behaviour, the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us" (*Anti-Oedipus* xv). Deleuze and Guattari frame totalitarianism as macropolitical and molar, and fascism as micropolitical and molecular. The totalitarian State is a product of fascism, and not the other way around (ATP 236); the fascist State is a suicidal state where lines of flight turn into lines of destruction (ATP 254-5). Importantly, they see microfascism as the answer to the fundamental and pressing question, which they see as left unanswered by Freudian psychoanalysis, of why it is that an individual or group desires its own repression; they are deeply concerned by this, for after all, "The masses certainly do not passively submit to power; nor do they "want" to be repressed in some sort of masochistic hysteria" (ATP 237).

Microfascism needs to be understood with regards to Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the Body without Organs (BwO), a term borrowed from writer, performer and dramatist Antonin Artaud. The BwO is central to Deleuze and Guattari's formulation of 'desire' and, like the rhizome, it is "a metaphor for a dynamic, non-hierarchical network" (Jørholt 85). However, rather than a 'thing', the BwO is a process, a potential, something that can (and must) be sought but never attained. Eva Jørholt considers it as "nothing but pure intensity, desire in and for itself, a desire which will lose its intensity if fulfilled" (80) – a place of continuous becoming and productive desire "to which all bodies aspire" (Grosz, "A Thousand Tiny Sexes" 174). The BwO is not a body that lacks

organs; rather it is what may happen if the organs themselves are not organised into units or differentiated into coded forms (Colebrook, *Deleuze* 130-1), and as such it is a “surface of intensities before it is stratified, organized, hierarchized” (Grosz, “A Thousand Tiny Sexes” 174). Similarly, the BwO is not opposite or pitted against organs; instead, it opposes the organism *itself*, which is the organisation of the organs: “the enemy is the organism” (ATP175), for the organism constricts and reroutes desire in the name of utility. Instead, the BwO, “as desire itself, is adjacent to the body as the unreachable limit of what a body is capable of” (Buchanan, “The Problem of the Body” 88).

Deleuze and Guattari describe three different BwOs. The first is the ‘full’, healthy BwO, that has the capacity to form new relations, and that “resembles the active and joyous, in that it... is intense and consistent” (Buchanan, “The Problem of the Body” 87). The second is the ‘empty’ catatonic non-productive BwO, which “is not only evacuated of organs and forms of organization, but also of its intensities and forces”; it is “a line of flight that ends in its own annihilation” (Grosz, “A Thousand Tiny Sexes” 175). They consider the way that the BwOs of the drug addict and the masochist are ‘empty’ or hollowed out, for they have filled themselves up with, respectively, cold<sup>9</sup> and pain waves to the point where no more connections or linkages may be made and no intensities may circulate or pass. The third BwO is the cancerous BwO, which is produced through fascist deterritorialisations. As opposed to molar totalitarianism, such fascism operates on a molecular level as a “runaway self-duplication of stratification” that endlessly repeats and reproduces “the selection of homogenised individuals in a process of ‘conformity’... [resulting in] social cloning and assembly-line personalities” (Protevi 103). It is in this cancerous molecular manner that fascism, like a virus, proliferates. It is because of this “system of petty insecurities that leads everyone into their own black hole” (ATP 252) – the growth of the fascist-within – that desire comes to desire its own repression. As such, fascism can be considered as “a deterioration of micro-political fluxes towards self destruction” (Busk 118).

Such a micro-political flux – an act of microfascism – is evident in the actions of Francis Aaron, both in his resentment towards the prisoners and his betrayal of Ripley

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<sup>9</sup> Deleuze and Guattari use the term “refrigerator waves” (ATP 168), a description drawn from William S. Burroughs’s description of a junkie’s feelings and desires in the novel *Naked Lunch*.

in *Alien*<sup>3</sup>. Aaron, a guard at the prison colony, is nicknamed “85” by the prisoners, after his IQ score as it is stated in his personnel file. He is not well liked by the prisoners, who consider him a fool and a ‘Company man’, and when the warden is killed, the prisoners decide that Ripley should take charge instead. Aaron is very loyal to the Company; he is convinced that the Company will save them all – meaning he can go home to see his family – although Ripley suggests that it is more likely that they will all be killed for having encountered the Alien. This loyalty in turn informs his anger towards the prisoners, for he feels that the power that he should have over them - a power that is invested in him through rank, and through the stratification of the molar Company, and through a division between criminal and non-criminal - is undermined by their ridicule. Indeed, the prisoners’ lack of respect for him undermines the very structure that he depends on and is complicit in for his own authority and safety, and he in turn chooses to be petty and obstructive, and to “sustain and nourish and cherish” (ATP 237) the fascist inside of himself, even though his allegiance to the Company – his self-stratification, his self-duplication and continual re-creation as “Company man” – will inevitably destroy him.

To curry favour Aaron informs the Company that the alien growing inside Ripley is a Queen, which hastens their approach, but he comes to realise that the retention of the Alien is the Company’s only priority. His loyalty is misguided and self-delusional; that which he was depending on to sustain him has instead devoured him. Once it is clear to him that he has been used and that he is disposable, expendable, a replaceable part of a larger machine, Aaron rebels by attacking Bishop II, the Company’s human envoy, with a spanner. We can consider Aaron as a part of a larger penal assemblage that consists of Aaron-Warden-Prison-Company and that is characterised by the way that it enforces and relies upon discipline and control. This act of disobedience is a crack that begins with a small resentment and develops into a physical act of violence: it is a rupture, a line of flight, an act of transformation and a freedom from this striated form. Although Aaron is shot by a Company soldier – a faceless Company man in a full-body suit, devoid of individuality or identity – the rupture remains, for his disobedience gives Ripley an opportunity to break away and destroy herself and the gestating Queen within her.



## WHAT DO BODIES DO?

Before considering the nature of the Company's relationship and encounters with Ripley and the Alien, it is worth considering what it, as a body can do. Deleuze and Guattari argue:

We know nothing about a body until we know what it can do, in other words, what its affects are, how they can or cannot enter into composition with other affects, with the affects of another body, either to destroy that body or be destroyed by it, either the exchange actions and passions with it or to join with it in composing a more powerful body. (ATP 284)

Drawing from the metaphysical and ethical writings of early modern Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza, they see a body defined not by its borders, its substance or its organs, but rather by its movement, speed, relations, potentials and intensive affects (ATP 287). They give the example of a workhorse, which is an element of a larger assemblage of horse-omnibus-street, and that is defined by its active and passive affects: "having a bit and bridle, being proud, having a big pee-pee maker, pulling heavy loads, being whipped, falling..." (ATP 284) The dynamic use of language here is very specific: the horse's affects are defined as having, pulling, being and falling, such that they relate to a capacity for or capability of something, as opposed to statements such as "the horse is brown" or "the horse is proud". There are other relationships, too; "the street enters into composition with the horse" (ATP 289), as the horse enters into composition with the rider, or the stable, or the saddle. (Not all such compositions may be as positive for the horse; a racehorse that enters into composition with a stone on a racetrack may break its leg, leading to it being euthanised.)

What, then, can the Company do? I suggest that its passive and active affects include: travelling great distances, claiming and expanding territory, terraforming planets, employing people, disciplining and punishing criminals and those considered transgressive, making deals, employing people, failing to care for its staff, lying, manipulating, controlling people, deploying the military, making ships and weapons, fighting, mining, holding meetings, developing primary resources into secondary resources, accumulating wealth, doing secret genetic research, failing to contain the Alien, being attacked, being defeated. In her discussion of David Cronenberg's science fiction body horror *eXistenZ* (CAN-UK 1999), Eva Jørholt argues that that film's large

corporations, which wish to take control of an immersive augmented reality computer game:

are more or less fascist organisations which are ready to kill in order to take possession – and control – of a popular game ... [T]hey will also have an interest in designing particular paths for large sections of the population's imagination ... [so that] they will be able to control people's dreams and desires and make them stratify into specific patterns. (95)

Similarly, the Company of the *Alien* tetralogy looks to co-opt, control and stratify the Alien, for by 'owning' it, it can perhaps control it, and then control its use and profit from it. As such, the affective capacities of the Company can be summed up as a) exerting control and consolidating power (over space, territory, resources and people; that is) and b) making money (capitalism and commodification) – that is, totalitarian stratification and reterritorialisation.

Where the Company stratifies and is stratified, endlessly repeating itself, the Alien is rhizomatic, molecular. Deleuze and Guattari note, "You can never get rid of ants because they form an animal rhizome that can rebound time and again after most of it has been destroyed" (ATP10); likewise, "Even some animals are [rhizomes], in their pack form. Rats are rhizomes. The rhizome itself assumes very diverse forms, from ramified surface extension in all directions to concretion into bulbs and tubers. When rats swarm over each other [sic]" (ATP 7). A rhizome may be broken and continue re-budding; the Alien endures and adapts, no matter how many xenomorphs are destroyed and what shape they may come to take. This is evident when Ripley approaches the quadrupedal xenomorph in *Alien*<sup>3</sup>, for she sees (and knows) that it is the same Alien that she has faced since Alien, even though this specific entity was freshly born only hours earlier and it has taken on aspects of its dog-host (becoming-dog, an interaction or relationship that destroyed the dog, which is no longer a live dog but dead dog flesh). She says to it, "you've been in my life so long, I can't remember anything else".

The Alien's affective capacities, then, include enduring, through surviving, hiding, running, attacking, learning and (most importantly) breeding – the perpetuation of Alien life, whatever form that life may take, and the re-production of Alien difference. The Alien exhibits intelligence, an awareness of cause and effect, the capability to learn how to use tools and, overall, a supreme adaptability. As android Ash states in *Alien*, the efficiency of this drive – of this relentless becoming – in conjunction with the hostility

and endurance of the xenomorph, makes the Alien “perfect”. These affects, both passive and active, are what makes it of value (military, economic, strategic) to the Company, for the Company wants to re-produce them in a manner that it has total control over. As such, I assert that at the heart of the Alien films lies a conflict over the control of reproduction and the mechanics of reproduction – the natural, violent, molecular line of the Alien, which makes visceral connections with those around it, and the totalitarian, fascist, molar Company line, which tries to capture this Alien line. While Ripley is the protagonist of the four films, she is caught within and becomes a tangible part this conflict.

### **SCHIZOANALYSIS AND BECOMING-ALIEN**

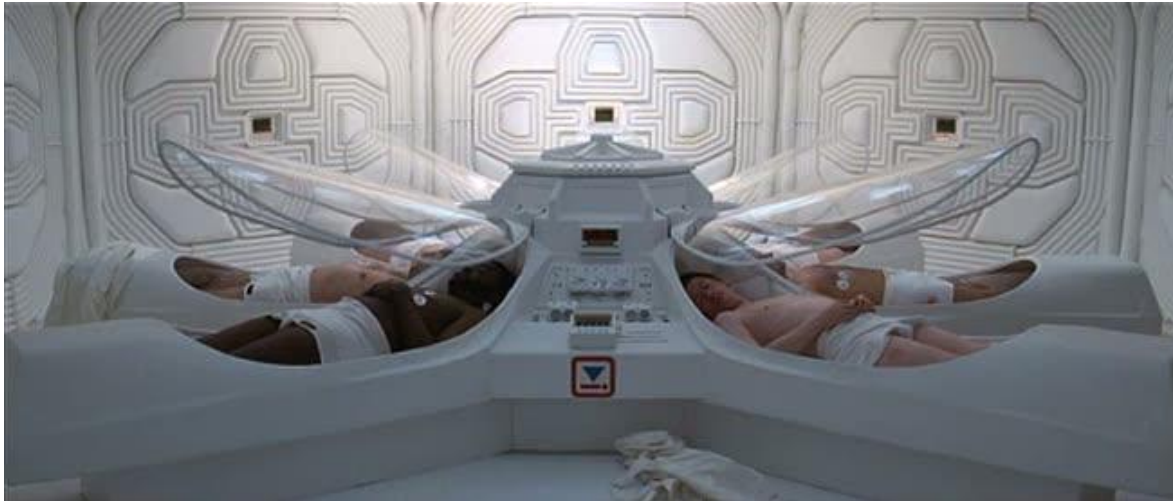
The flows, intensities and encounters between the Company, Ripley and the Alien can be mapped with a particular emphasis on the ways that the Company tries to stratify the unruly, generative and rhizomatic potentialities of the Alien, and how Ripley – her position within yet opposed to the Company, her maternal affects and her special relationship with the Alien – becomes a part of this assemblage. Teresa Rizzo argues that “in the *Alien* films the body is presented as something that is in constant process. It changes according to its environment and its encounters with other bodies” (“The *Alien* Series” 333). So, from here I consider how bodies (whatever form they may take) and becomings (such as the cloning of Ripley and the Alien) can be considered less as specifically monstrous, and more as *new* becomings and new ways of living that may have positive or negative outcomes. While a Deleuzoguattarian approach is less concerned with narrative than, say, a psychoanalytic or a sociocultural reading, it is nonetheless worthwhile to consider the films in chronological order to map the way that these encounters and relationships develop and extend or founder and become blocked. In particular, mapping such relationships and connections reveals the interface between the Company (becoming-the-same) and a becoming-Alien that creeps across human and fleshy bodies, inanimate bodies, and assemblages. I suggest that each film is a “block of becoming”, a shared deterritorialisation (ATP 324) that charts the movement of a line of flight that passes between the Alien and Ripley, while aesthetically articulating further evocations or encounters of the Ripley-Alien assemblage, which

comes to bud in unexpected and sometimes unstable ways. As Deleuze and Guattari argue, becoming is not an evolution or a conjugation, but an alliance or a symbiosis (ATP 263), and these alliances are aesthetically presented and rearticulated throughout, as Ripley (and the Alien) intersect, decompose and recompose with each encounter (Rizzo, “The *Alien* Series” 332).

### ***ALIEN*: THE INVISIBLE MATERNAL**

The first film of the series, *Alien*, charts the molecular interactions between Ripley and the rhizomatic Alien. These interactions challenge the molar autonomy of the Company and spark a becoming-Alien that continues throughout. The first visual expression of the Company is through the introduction of the ship’s quiet, dim, empty interior; the clean lines and rounded surfaces of the corridors, the infirmary, the engine space, clad in metals, padding and plastics in greys, blues and white, and the soft, cool artificial light all contributing to an aesthetic of smooth interiority. This space is industrial, segmented, well-organised, and capable of existing without (or for) its inhabitants, making the presence of people – all crew, with a function – seem like something permitted rather than a necessity. The activation of the ship’s computer, MU-TH-R 182 (or ‘Mother’), is heralded with lights, beeps, clicks and an electronic hum. As it receives information – the distress signal from planetoid LV-426 – the light emitted by its shifting text and low resolution graphics are reflected on the visor of an emergency space helmet, creating the image of a faceless, impassive pilot engaged in a covert mechanised conversation.

Similarly, the first incidence of reproductive imagery is clean, white, sleek and interior; this establishes the clinical lines of the Company. The sleeping crew are housed within clusters of white, egg-like pods (fig. 6.2), and upon the receipt of the distress signal they are woken and ‘birthed’ by the ship, emerging from their pods slowly and sleepily. Catherine Constable, drawing from Barbara Creed’s analysis of the film in chapter two of *The Monstrous-Feminine*, marks this bloodless, painless ‘birth’ as “scientific and sterile, in clear contrast with the alien’s physical materiality” (173). The



**Fig. 6.2 Clinical lines:** the clean, smooth white stasis pods open up as the *Nostromo* wakes the sleeping crew (*Alien*).

ship is out well past the ‘frontier’, and the suggestion of organic curves acknowledges that while the *Nostromo* is an industrial vessel with a specific function, it nonetheless is also the life support for its crew.

In comparison, the *Alien* milieu is sexual, organic and visceral. The away team, tiny against the hull of the derelict spaceship, make their way inside by crawling into enormous apertures that recall vaginal openings and the labia minora. In a dark, misty, cavernous space, hundreds of large transparent, moist eggs are laid out along the floor beneath a bright, permeable force field. The fecund egg-layer is conspicuous by her absence, but she is present in the *mise-en-scène* and the soundscape. The interior of the ship – an erotic “biomechanical landscape”<sup>10</sup> – appears to be held up with ribs, bones, sinews, cartilaginous tubes and tubular connections, all giving the impression that the away team are walking through the chest or belly of a massive beast (fig 6.3). The soundtrack features long, deep resonant chords, like whale song, coupled with repeating mechanical echoes, the dripping of moisture, and faint, high, sharp strings that chitter like insects and recall the murderous birds that are present in the soundtrack to Alfred Hitchcock’s 1960 film *Psycho*; perhaps, “music as an alien language, one indecipherable in its particular meanings yet emotionally communicative” (Sobchack, *Screening Space* 208, emphasis original). The *Alien* is an invasive, teeming

<sup>10</sup> This term is used by H. R. Giger in the richly informative documentary *The Beast Within: The Making of ‘Alien’* (Lauzirika 2003), during an discussion of the creation of the set of the immense derelict ship.



**Fig. 6.3 Alien abstraction:** The human explorers are dwarfed by the immense cartilaginous biomechanical landscape of the derelict ship, which is infested with Alien eggs (*Alien*).

parasite rather than the pilot and creator of the ship, and given that the unstable nature of the organic body is a recurring theme in the *Alien* series, it is apt that the Alien Queen is at first attendant only through abstraction.

Our first real view of the Alien exposes its aggressive, unruly capacity for reproduction and change – a violent desire – an affect that makes it attractive to the Company. Kane peers into a twitching egg and the larva leaps out and attaches itself to his face. With this, Kane is drawn into an Alien line, becoming a machinic component of part of a much larger Alien reproductive assemblage that incorporates the egg-layer, the egg, Kane (as womb or incubator), and the chestburster, a sexless drone without a Queen, but Kane's violent becoming-other destroys him in the process. The escaped Alien hides, creeps and remaps the ship; it is a deterritorialising line of flight that breaks through walls and dissolves floors. As it runs, hides, and attacks, the ship changes; the *Nostromo*'s clean lines, hard surfaces and fixed spaces become permeable, eroded, broken and refigured. Slowly the infiltrated ship exhibits signs of becoming-Alien, for as the Alien infiltrates the vessel, it begins to take on some of the aesthetic qualities of the derelict – dark, forbidding, organic and unsafe. The jets of carbon dioxide in the *Nostromo*'s engine room that come to spray throughout the ship are visual echoes of the hazy mist of the derelict ship, and the previously safe spaces of the *Nostromo* – mapped

out in detail in the film's opening scenes – become precariously unstable and threatening.

While the crew of the *Nostromo* are all paid employees of the Company, their loyalties are to themselves and to each other – supple segmentations and molecular lines branching from and sometimes rejoining the Company's molar line. The covert android, Ash, is different; he is a machine, an extension of the intelligence controlling the ship and a machinic part of the Company's system of control and co-option: in short, a 'Company man'. His synthetic frame is concealed behind his human skin as he hides in plain sight inside the ship. The savage sexual attack of the facehugger's forceful penetration of Kane's mouth is echoed when Ash, his true nature and agenda made clear, violently attacks Ripley, forcing a rolled up pornographic magazine down her throat in a manner that explicitly connotes oral rape. Other crew members retaliate and attack him, accidentally tearing off his head and his burst and broken flesh reveals leaking white synthetic fluids, semen-like and profuse, obscuring wires and metallic machinic components. The Ash-Company biomechanical aesthetic is clumsy and messy when compared to the sleek and easy grace of the Alien; Ash's aggression and determination are programmed attributes where the Alien is naturally hostile and cunning. Before he is finally unplugged, Ash tells Ripley that he admires the Alien's purity, the way that it is "unclouded by conscience, remorse, or delusions of morality". These attributes are what the Company values, hungers for and aspires towards – and perhaps the Alien is, in this sense, the Company's BwO.

At the end of *Alien*, the encounter between Ripley and the Alien, the offspring of a physically absent but aesthetically present Queen, ends with the destruction of the drone Alien and the *Nostromo*. Ripley is the sole human survivor, accompanied only by the ship's cat, Jones, who is framed as a child-proxy. This interaction marks the instigation of both Ripley's becoming-Alien and the Alien's becoming-Ripley.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> It is worth highlighting that many of the becomings-Alien and lines of flight that I discuss in this analysis are violent. I suggest that it is because of the parasitic and opportunistic nature of the Alien (and, too, the Company): these becomings are often brought about through force and without the consent of one or both parties. Of course, not all such becomings in horror film are violent or unwanted, although it could be argued that the nature of the horror film is such that they are over-represented.

**ALIENS: THE EXPLICIT MATERNAL**

In *Aliens*, the Company – as technomilitary force and stratifying Statist machine – attempts to suppress and the Alien incursion on its terraforming colony. Again, they wish to reconfigure the Alien from external, unpredictable threat to economic and scientific resource. Rosi Braidotti suggests that contemporary science fiction traces lines of “affinity and co-extensivity between women, technology and animals or insects”, and that their mutual assimilation within the category of ‘difference’ “facilitates a deep empathy between women and aliens [that also] favours exchanges and mutual influences” (Braidotti 150). This becomes apparent in the expression of Ripley and the Alien Queen’s comparable maternal capacities – *being* mothers and maternal, *protecting* their child(ren), *fighting, resisting* the Company’s control. These are emblematic of their respective becomings-Alien and -Ripley, and also the budding of an organic, reproductive line of transformation.

Ripley’s awakening at the outset of the film is a re-birth, and a visual translation to or re-connection with the Alien. Safe inside her stasis pod, the outline of her calm face dissolves into the curve of the earth, alluding to the iconography of the star-child in Stanley Kubrick’s *2001: A Space Odyssey* (UK-US 1968; see fig 3.2). The soundtrack borrows heavily from Armenian composer Aram Khachaturian’s *Gayane* ballet suite (1942), a slow and mournful piece of music for strings that was used in *2001* to introduce the solitary existence of astronauts Poole and Bowman, who are the only people currently out of cryosleep aboard the spaceship *Discovery One* on its long mission to Jupiter. From the point of view of the darkened interior of Ripley’s shuttle, a bright, blue light shines from without in through a window, and sparks fly into the shuttle as something cuts its way in through the metal door, breaching the hermetic boundary that has been keeping Ripley safe and alive. Then, a mechanical probe enters and scans the area with blue lasers, before two people in protective suits climb in to explore. The deep indigo of the shadows, the bright electric blue lines of the laser and the harsh blue-white light from outside the breach recall the darkened blues and lit helmets of the away team in *Alien*, but in this instance Ripley and the cat lie dormant, like mother and child, instead of the Alien eggs. Ripley, reborn, has been altered (and is still being altered) by her encounter with the Alien, and she shows a new consciousness, new affective capacities and new potentialities – although this intensive innovation is





**Fig. 6.4 Component parts:** Where the sleeping pods of the *Nostromo* had soft, almost organic curves, the pods of the military vessel U.S.S. *Sulaco* emphasise repetition and utility rather than comfort. Here, the sleeping soldiers are more obviously parts in a larger machine (*Aliens*).

deeply unpleasant for her. She is now plagued by delirium and dreams that leave her screaming and sweating: she spasms and screams; she waves; the Alien is inside of her, stretching flesh and skin, bursting free; the Alien is not inside of her, and she is awake. Her face sheens with sweat in both sleep and wakefulness, leaving her as shiny and slick as the Alien's elongated, chitinous head.

The Company is now more visible, more direct, overtly displaying its strength. Where in *Alien* the Company was present in the hidden, mechanised body of the android Ash and the clear organisation of the interior of the ship, now its rigidity is obvious, powerful and threatening. The hard, disciplined bodies – of the marines, their dropship, their starship the U. S. S. *Sulaco*, each with bigger and more obvious guns and weapons – are more severe and more mechanised than the streamlined body of the *Nostromo* (fig. 6.4). Even Ripley, stripped of her flight status and branded hysteric, finds a way to align with this firm utility, by working a cargo loader – a large, powered exoskeleton equipped with large pincers, forming a powerful Ripley-machine assemblage. In the enormous hanger of the *Sulaco*, the soundtrack beats a proud military tattoo. (Also displayed proudly, back at the hub where Ripley is revived, are Alien facehuggers,

suspended in tall transparent cylinders like trophies; Ripley is appalled when one twitches to life and flings itself, angrily but impotently, at the walls of its tank, all frustrated instinct.) When Ripley and the marines wake from their stasis as they reach the planetoid LV-426, their sleep pods are less like the gentle, sterile egg-shaped berths of the *Nostramo*, and more like an assembly line made up of cylinders of metal and glass; like the facehuggers, the people inside these cylinders are just tools. These bodies are strong and often hypermasculine, but they are not agile. The first exception to this is Burke, a slick, glib Company representative, who slyly but aggressively attempts to bring back an Alien sample, ultimately by trying to have Ripley and Newt implanted with Alien larvae.<sup>12</sup> The second exception is the Company droid Bishop who is benign and helpful, an 'improvement' upon Ash's model.

In comparison, the rhizomatic Alien is swift and spreads like a contagion or an infection vector, forming new Alien connections and networks across the Company colony through its shifting multiplicity of xenomorphs. It (re-)infects the derelict ship with drones; then runs Alien lines through Hadley's Hope – the Company's terraforming colony, its community and buildings component parts in a colonising machine – in a violent and insidious rejection of the economic and physical control that the Company is trying to exert over the landscape. We rarely get a full look at the xenomorphs; instead, there are flickering glimpses of tail, claw, mouth and fang that rush past with a speed and strength that completely overwhelms the humans (both hunters and hunted). The Aliens are fast and fragmented, and do not form a stable target; although the marines train automated weapons upon them, and fire thousands of bullets, the drones attack in waves and are almost impossible to defeat or overwhelm. Instead, they run through the vents and ducts, deterritorialising and reterritorialising Company space as Alien space, like a guerrilla force. (The only human survivor of the colony is the young girl Newt; she knows these ducts well and is able to navigate them, and her nimbleness is a lesson to the marines.) The xenomorphs aren't directly killing the colonists – whose presence has stimulated the Alien's re-emergence – and instead they are abducting them and wrapping them in sticky, resinous cocoons so that they might provide food for the expanding Alien. Where the Company sees the humans as a way of turning the planetoid

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<sup>12</sup> The extended edition of the film goes further and suggests that Burke also orchestrated the (re)discovery of the Alien hive in the derelict ship by an unfortunate family of prospectors – Newt's parents – and thus instigated the extermination of the colony, all to acquire an Alien sample.

into a resource, the opportunistic xenomorphs consume them and use them to help birth more Aliens.

The maternal affect that is suggested in *Alien* through Ripley's association with the cat Jones and through the aesthetic presence of the absent Alien Queen becomes clearly expressed. Ripley is categorically identified as a childless mother, grieving for the death of her natural born daughter. She forms a filial relationship with Newt, a relationship that Catherine Constable suggests is characterised by "shared experiences of being sole survivors rather than by physical reproduction" (188), and at the end of the film, after Ripley has defended the child from the Alien, Newt calls her "mommy". (Newt is also a 'mother' – she carries with her a soft doll named Casey.) The first glimpse of the immense Alien Queen is that of her pulsating ovipositor – a large, transparent intestine-like tube that is suspended by a web-like membrane, through which she deposits her eggs. Ripley stands in the misty egg chamber, clutching Newt firmly, appalled at the teeming, prolific extent of the Queen's egg-laying - one expression of maternal capacity next to another. The image of Ripley's horrified face is juxtaposed against images of the jaws and head of the immense fecund Alien Queen, who is more insect-like than her offspring, and whose bony headpiece resembles a spiked crown. The close up on their respective faces marks a mutual recognition between the Queen and Ripley – both reproduction machines, and both intruders, each a translation of the other (fig. 6.5). Deleuze and Guattari note that "...wherever there is multiplicity, you will also find an exceptional individual, and it is with that individual that an alliance must be made in order to become-animal" (ATP 268), a becoming of great importance to them, and one which negates an anthropocentric view of life and experience. They give an example from *Willard* (Mann US 1971), a horror film about a man who has a strange affinity for rats, stating that "Willard has his favourite, the rat Ben, and only becomes-rat in his relationship with him" (ATP 268). (Willard's becoming-rat does not end well for him; he is ultimately devoured by a pack of rats led by Ben.) In this instance, it is Ripley who is the exceptional individual, and the Queen who is the exceptional Alien; the Queen is her "favourite enemy" (ATP 269), and vice versa.



**Fig. 6.5 Ripley and the Queen:** Ripley, carrying her child-proxy, and the Queen, who is in the process of laying eggs, regard one another with fear and hostility in a series of shot / reverse shots (*Aliens*).

The film's climax marks a plane of intensity, an intensive block of Ripley's becoming-Alien. At the beginning of *A Thousand Plateaus*, in their initial discussion of the rhizome, Deleuze and Guattari consider how the wasp and the orchid trace one another, deterritorialising and reterritorialising one another, so that the wasp becomes a part of the orchid's reproductive apparatus as the wasp transports the orchid's pollen, an "increase in valence" that is more than sheer imitation (ATP 11). The physical encounter between the Queen and Ripley likewise forms a tracing, as they are heterogeneous elements, forming a rhizome. While they certainly imitate one another, this encounter – which the film's director James Cameron calls "the final cat-fight between the moms" (Cameron) – marks a more profound connection, the beginnings of a mutual becoming that will become more apparent in *Alien*<sup>3</sup>. Ripley incinerates the

Queen's eggs and throws grenades at the Queen's ovipositor; the Queen tears herself free, making herself as agile as Ripley, and gallops after them, targeting Newt, Ripley's 'child'. The Queen learns from Ripley and is able to summon an elevator. All around them the colony shakes with explosions and klaxons wail, recalling Ripley's escape from the *Nostramo* – another iteration of the same conflict. When they finally confront one another, on the cargo floor of the *Sulaco* (another escape, and another Alien stowaway), Ripley puts on her powered exoskeleton loading suit as she moves to protect her surrogate daughter; she is a mecha-Ripley assemblage, an orange warning light flashing above her head, wearing the Company's colours and materials but not fighting for it. Earlier in the film, one of the marines describes the Queen as "The momma. She's bad ass man, she's big", but now this description applies as much to Ripley. She is of the same size and strength as the Queen, but flesh encased in steel instead of an Alien biomechanical exoskeleton. Ripley's face, sweaty and half-lit, stares back at the shiny, half-lit face of the Queen (fig. 6.6). Ripley shouts with exertion, the hydraulics of her loader suit creaking and whining, as the Queen hisses and shrieks back at her: Ripley has more in common – and, more importantly *does* more in common – with the Alien Queen than she does with her employers, the Company.



**Fig. 6.6 “The final cat-fight between the moms”:** Ripley and the Alien Queen, each of whom are hulking, monstrous iterations of maternal affect, engage in hand-to-hand combat (*Aliens*).

***ALIEN*<sup>3</sup>: THE INVASIVE MATERNAL**

In *Alien*<sup>3</sup>, Ripley – as host to (or ‘pregnant’ with) an Alien Queen, thus a Ripley-Alien assemblage – is identified by the Company as a valuable commodity. Rather than submit to their authority, she moves along a nomad line, using her burgeoning Alien affinity to help the prisoners in a Company penal colony destroy an attacking Alien, before destroying herself and the Queen in spite of the Company.

Where *Alien* and *Aliens* open with Ripley sleeping, and with long, lingering pans across space, *Alien*<sup>3</sup> opens with flickering, fragmented images that impart a sense of crisis and danger. Short takes that appear between the presentation of white credits on the darkness of space show images of Ripley and Newt’s sleeping pods, the *Sulaco* moving through space, and an opening, dripping egg attached to a corner of the pod bay. This is followed by the slowly flexing long, crab-like ‘fingers’ of a facehugger, backed by shafts of light from a grate above, accompanied by a single soprano voice sustaining a long, high note: a child’s voice calling the same song as the deep rumble of the egg chamber in *Alien*. Extreme close ups show Newt’s face, then the glass over Newt’s pod cracking, followed by the drip of green acid bleeding through white metal, a sparking, and the smoke of an electrical fire. A computer screen shows that the stasis has been interrupted, and quick shots of a medical scan show a facehugger clamped to someone’s head, the victim anonymous. Red blood seeps through white cotton, and red alarm lights turn and flash against a dark background, as if the red of the blood is seeping through the image. Extreme close ups show Ripley’s face contorting, the blooming of fire – a suggestion of the flames that will end the film – and machinic components of the pods readying for ejection. Finally, the reflection of a spinning alarm light is superimposed over Ripley’s face, spinning from the centre of her forehead, marking internal threat and danger, before the ejected pod tumbles through space, falling from the sky like a red shooting star before landing in water on a hellish planet. The deaths of space marine Corporal Hicks, with whom Ripley was forming a potentially romantic connection, and her surrogate daughter Newt, leave Ripley (again reborn) alone. These quick cuts and close ups remove a stable frame of reference from the image, and are a sensational and affective expression of the flux and possible violence of becoming-Alien. The opening images and they style of editing are themselves rhizomatic, forming budding



connections of inference and meaning, and aestheticising matters of emotional content through the creation of a visual assemblage.

At the planet's prison colony, the semiotic presence of the Company is everywhere. The prisoner's bodies are not their own; they are marked, bar-coded, like stock. Weyland-Yutani logos are on their clothing and equipment, and there the large beams and supports that gird the interior of the prison form abstract Ws and Ys. The vast halls of the penal colony – part barracks, part ship – represent a church or cathedral, a place of worship. Its male prisoners, all of whom have an XYY-chromosomal genetic abnormality and most of whom are violent sexual offenders, have taken religious vows. Low angle shots and the use of echoes throughout the film emphasise the size, height and scale of the colony. Squares, perpendicular features and grates create shadows, bars of light like prison bars in an expression of physical and psychological control (fig. 6.7). The Company is there, too, in the computer; when Ripley scans her chest in the remains of the pod and discovers the Queen inside her, they are automatically alerted. Ripley revives what is left of the friendly Bishop android, who was partially destroyed at the end of *Aliens*, and he tells her that “the Company knows



**Fig. 6.7 The Company is everywhere:** bars, perpendicular features, a pronounced contrast between light and shadow and sharply angled shots emphasise the size and control of the Company, even though the prisoners, technically, are self-governing. Note the way that the massive struts on the left hand side of the image evoke the ‘W’ and ‘Y’ of ‘Weyland-Yutani’ (*Alien*<sup>3</sup>).

everything that happened on the ship. It all goes into the computer and sent back to Network”; the Company forms connective links and lines of communication that traverse space and time, but that all work to recapture nomad lines.

The colony itself is a molecular site of struggle and contestation. The prisoners are a brotherhood whose attack on (and defence against) the Alien is as much a rebellion against the controlling Company as it is an act of self-preservation. The hierarchy of their composite, millennial, apocalyptic religion likewise challenges the dominance of the Company and its command structure – much to the frustration of ‘Company men’ such as prison guard Francis “85” Aaron, who I have discussed earlier in this chapter. In the prison, the sacred sits alongside the profane; the prisoners are ‘intolerables’ who are nonetheless tolerated by the Company because they retain some use-value as part of their penal assemblage. Ripley takes on their muted robes and shaves her hair, attempting to become liminal and desexed, to become a conforming, component part of the prisoner assemblage (even if this means taking on their superficial mantle of Company property), but this is an imitation, not a becoming. Grieving, broken Ripley (and the broken things she has brought with her, two dead humans, one broken ship, one demolished droid) is in turn not tolerated by the prisoners, until her knowledge of and affinity with the Alien becomes useful. Like Cassandra, the tragic prophet of Greek myth, she preaches doom and death; like Cassandra, she is largely ignored.

This superficial, aesthetic rejection of the feminine signals Ripley’s becoming-other. (This is ironic, given her implied state of ‘pregnancy’, and that for the first time her sexuality is present explicitly, for she bluntly courts and then has sex with the prison’s doctor.) When Ripley shaves her head she becomes sleek, blunted, like the Alien. They are not one-in-another, but a block of becoming, a Ripley-Queen. Ripley says that she is “dead anyway... I can’t survive it”, but the Ripley-Alien assemblage will bud violently into a newborn Queen that will incorporate Ripley’s DNA (much as the other xenomorph, which is running around the penal colony, has taken on aspects of the dog in which it incubated). Ripley fears this violence and the potential capture of the Queen by the Company, so she looks for ways to kill herself but is repeatedly denied. Despite this antagonism, Ripley sometimes uses and embraces her Queen-ness; “I’m all part of the family”, she tells the dog xenomorph as she heads into and becomes a part of the



darkness; “where are you when I need you” she whispers; the xenomorph senses her becoming, her shift, and will not attack her. She forms an alliance – physical, emotional, psychic and political – with the Alien, for by enticing the dog xenomorph to destruction (and throwing herself as Ripley-Queen into the molten lead) she blocks the Company’s reterritorialisation.

The presence of the gestating Queen begins to alter Ripley’s experiences and expressions. Patricia Pisters notes that “One of the most important aspects of becoming... is the sensation through which this becoming is felt: becoming creates new sensitivities” (148). Becoming-Alien Ripley survives the pod’s crash, but the others are bloodied corpses, only so much meat, and she carries this like a scarlet letter: the whites of one of her eyes is bloodied, a stain, like the scar of burned plastic and metal left on the stasis pod by the alien facehugger. There are more encounters, such as the Alien facehugger’s unfortunate becoming-dog, which expands the affects of the Alien but destroys the host dog in the process, is less a symbiosis than it is a destructive line of flight. Its birth and its connection with Ripley – Ripley’s increasingly visceral becoming-Alien – is formed visually through cross cuts and is juxtaposed against the funeral of Newt and Corporal Hicks, for as the bodies are cast into the heat of the foundry, a new xenomorph bursts through the dog and Ripley’s nose begins to bleed, like a fleshy echo of kinship or recognition. Later, one of the inmates is attacked by the xenomorph and thrown into an enormous spinning fan in the air-conditioning system, and Ripley is startled awake.

Again, the Alien is an unpredictable deterritorialising nomad line running through Company space, but this time the Alien is more explicitly expressed through movement, image and editing. This often takes the form of low angle tracking shots, so that the movement of the camera is from the Alien’s point of view and through a fish eye lens; we, the spectator, race through the penal colony, the walls warping around us, as the Alien re-maps the colony in its own image, and we understand its sense of space and time in our own becoming-Alien. As the Alien’s influence spreads, the colours of the penal colony shift from harsh white light on grey metal and concrete – the strict, utilitarian Company palette – to smoky, dim sepia tones, browns and oranges: cool, stark inorganic to dim organic. These colours shift as the lines of the colony change in a slow becoming-Alien that changes the prison from a strict, controlled environment to

something hellish, steaming and Stygian. The prison becomes less like a Company outpost and now recalls like the darkness and the mists of the derelict ship in *Alien*, aesthetic shifts and allusions that are a direct abstract expression of becoming. The ducts that were highlighted in *Alien* and *Aliens* now become immense shafts that bore through the colony's structure. These myriad openings are anthill-like, with its prisoner-workers taking on maintenance – much like the 'worker' Aliens tend to their hive Queen.

The climax of the film marks more reproductive terror and a destructive expression of Ripley's becoming-Alien. Ripley draws the Alien through the tubes, vents and ducts, like a midwife birthing a child. Finally the xenomorph is doused in molten lead, subsumed in a thick sea of yellow, black and orange; it bursts out, is drenched with water, and explodes; time slows down, and pieces of it fall, slowly, like torn fabric. The Company arrives to claim Ripley and the Alien, and they start by capturing and erasing the tracings left by the Alien. The empty mess hall, which had been dim and brown, reverts to grey and white as the Company's representatives move through it. Some are dressed in white protective suits (a rejection of individuality) and their business suit-clad human emissary, Bishop II, claims to be the organic *pater* of the Bishop droid Ripley had come to trust – a "friendly face". He tells Ripley that she could still have children – a grim joke – as the light behinds her glows redder and redder. Finally he reveals himself as Company man, crying "Think of all we can learn from it! It's the chance of a lifetime, you must let me have it! It's a magnificent specimen".

Instead, Ripley makes a new map: she plunges with her arms held wide, saint-like, into the furnace (fig. 6.8). The infant Queen bursts through her chest and Ripley, beatific, clutches it to her like a baby: she falls, surrounded by blossoming flames in the image of a martyred saint. This plunge into the fire is a continuation (perhaps, a consummation) of the aesthetic shift from cold-Company-grey to hellish-Alien-orange. With both Alien lines abruptly halted, the colours revert: the lights are shut off, leaving the colony blanketed in grey-blue shadows, and the whole prison taken off-line, mothballed – another Company failure.



**Fig. 6.8 Saint Ripley:** Ripley falls backwards into the foundry, arms wide, then as the Queen bursts from her chest she holds it close, evoking the image of a martyred saint. The two recede as they fall, then disappear into the roiling blossoms of the bright molten lead (*Alien<sup>3</sup>*).

### ***ALIEN: RESURRECTION: MATERNAL BECOMINGS***

*Alien: Resurrection* continues not only the nomad line of Ripley's becoming-Alien, but also the Alien's becoming-Ripley. In this film the Company, in the interest of regimenting and commodifying reproduction, forces a genetically modified becoming-other. However, even though the cloned Queen, her drones, the unstable clones and her Alien-human hybrid offspring are all destroyed, Ripley clone #8 lives on.

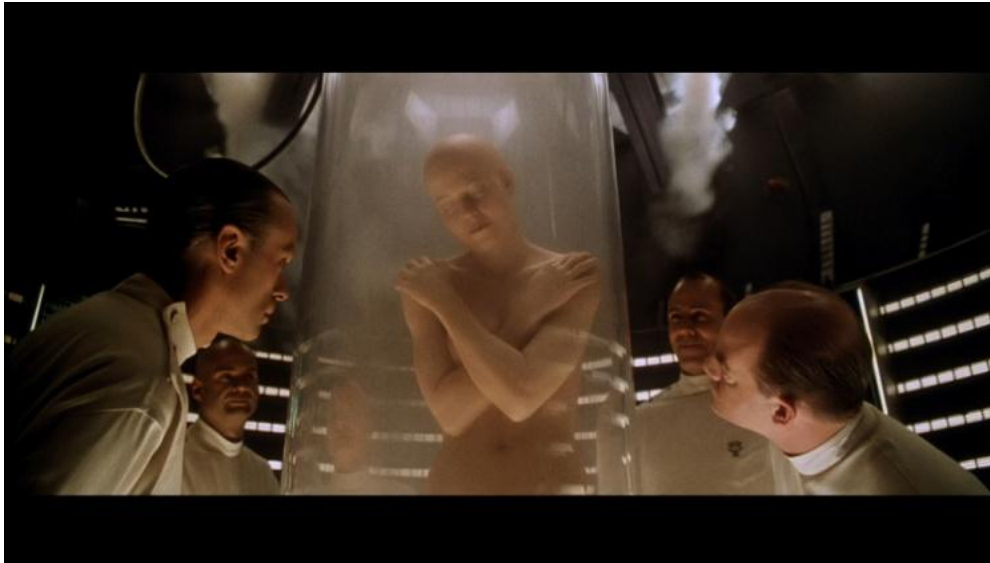
The film's credit sequence presents an undulating, amorphous expression of fleshy materiality, introducing the film's content and thematic concerns through abstraction and form. In extreme close up, pieces of human and Alien viscera – teeth,

ears, hair, sticky flesh, orifices and protuberances – squirm past the camera in a manner that is unsettling and destabilising, dissolving into new images and twisting on the screen. Teresa Rizzo, who provides an in-depth Deleuzean perspective on the sequence, states that the opening is “shot and edited in such a way as to produce a series of visual effects that break with human perception” (340) – a becoming-other that infiltrates the *mise-en-scène* from the film’s outset. The extreme close up is such that “we never see the borders of a container... This effect disorients the eye, making normal perception impossible” (341). This disorientation aesthetically signals the unfixed nature of human and Alien subjectivity that pervades the film, as well as the film’s interest in embodiment and transformation.

Reproduction, control and maternal affectivity are central to *Alien: Resurrection*, and this is first made explicit in the film’s initial post-credits scene. The visual and aural allusion to *2001: A Space Odyssey*’s star child that opens *Aliens* is continued; Ripley 8, naked, bald and pale, morphs from a celestial pre-adolescent into an adult, covering her breasts demurely like Botticelli’s Venus. This visual connection is important; in *2001*, the star child is astronaut Dave Bowman’s BwO, an expanding potentiality that breaks through physical and mental limitations (that is, the organisation of the organs), and results in a new way of being – “an embryonic over-man who heralds a new cycle of human evolution” (Powell, *Deleuze, Altered States and Film* 171). This visual metaphor (or semiotic connection) signals a plasticity of body and identity. However, where the immense star child floats free and untethered, peering at first at the planet Earth and then turning to regard the audience before fading to black as the organ fanfare at the end of Richard Strauss’s tone poem *Also Sprach Zarathustra* reverberates,<sup>13</sup> Ripley 8’s ‘birth’ is less noble. She is encased within a glass cylinder – like the captive facehuggers in *Aliens* – and is peered at by Company scientists (fig 6.9). The low angled shot positions Ripley 8’s naked, pale form somewhat higher than that of the scientists, emphasising her increased height and suggesting the scientist’s secular devotion – an apt visual metaphor, given the saint-like manner in which Ripley kills herself at the conclusion of *Alien*<sup>3</sup>. This wonder is later dissipated; Ripley 8 is proclaimed to be waste,

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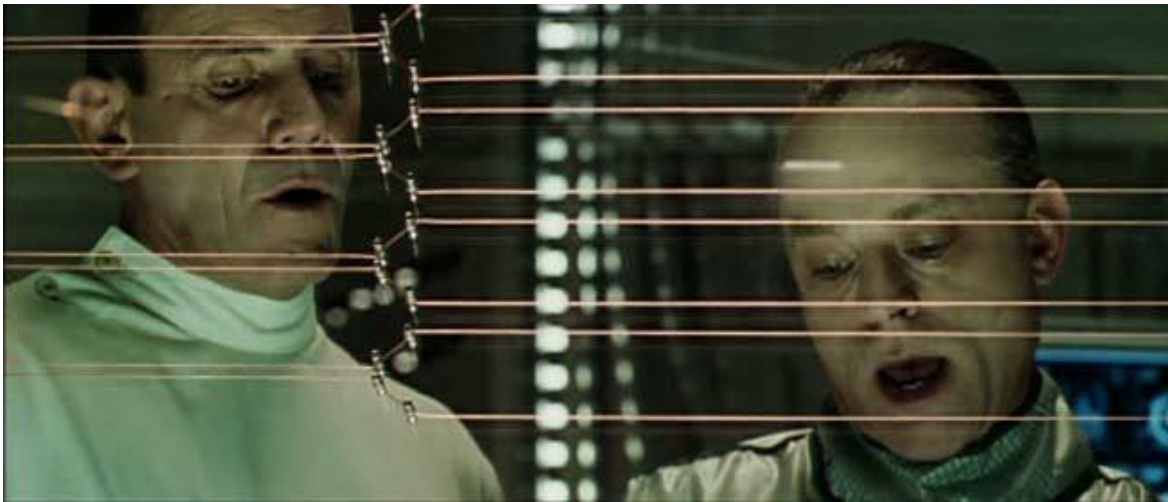
<sup>13</sup> In the second half of chapter four of *Deleuze, Altered States and Film*, Anna Powell offers a nuanced reading of this sequence in which she connects the film’s themes with Friedrich Nietzsche’s concept of the ‘eternal return’; she highlights director Stanley Kubrick’s explicit choice to use Strauss’ *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, which was inspired by Nietzsche’s work of the same name (see 163).



**Fig. 6.9 Ripley's new way of being:** Ripley 8 is peered at by the Company scientists on the *USM Auriga* in a shot that recalls both the star child of *2001: A Space Odyssey* and Sandro Botticelli's painting "The Birth of Venus" (*Alien: Resurrection*).

a "meat by-product" who has acted as host and incubator to "her majesty" the Alien Queen, and she is referred to as "it" by her creator-captors.

Where the marines of *Aliens* and the Company representatives of *Alien*<sup>3</sup> are blunt tools of domination, the genetic scientists are the apotheosis of the Company's desire for co-option and regulation, and its drive towards the "capture and bondage" (Jordan 133) of the deterritorialised and nomadic. They exert control quite literally at a molecular level as they try to tease Ripley and the Queen's genetic make-up apart enough to be able to separate them physically. This biological separation fails; Ripley and the Queen were always-already intermingling, even prior to sharing of one flesh. Although the scientists are less aggressive than their antecedents, they are just as domineering. During the surgical excision of the Queen, the scientists with their close-cropped hair and their plain, white and silver gowns are a human extension of the ship, and their metal tools, mechanical gloves and surgical lasers an extension of them. Electronic wires that run horizontally through the plastic enclosure above Ripley 8's operating table divide the scientist's faces into bands, further reflected in glassy surfaces, expressing them as fragmented machinic components of a larger mechanical or cybernetic entity (fig. 6.10). The excision of the Queen is a clinical parody of sex and conception, for as



**Fig 6.10. The excision of the Queen:** The scientists, in identical gowns and identical haircuts, their image split into bands, are fragmented machinic components of the ship and the Company (*Alien: Resurrection*).

one scientist makes an incision in Ripley, his face contorts in a silent groan, as if approaching orgasm, and when he manipulates the Queen's head out of the wound, he whispers "yes!" before gasping as it pops out of Ripley 8's chest.

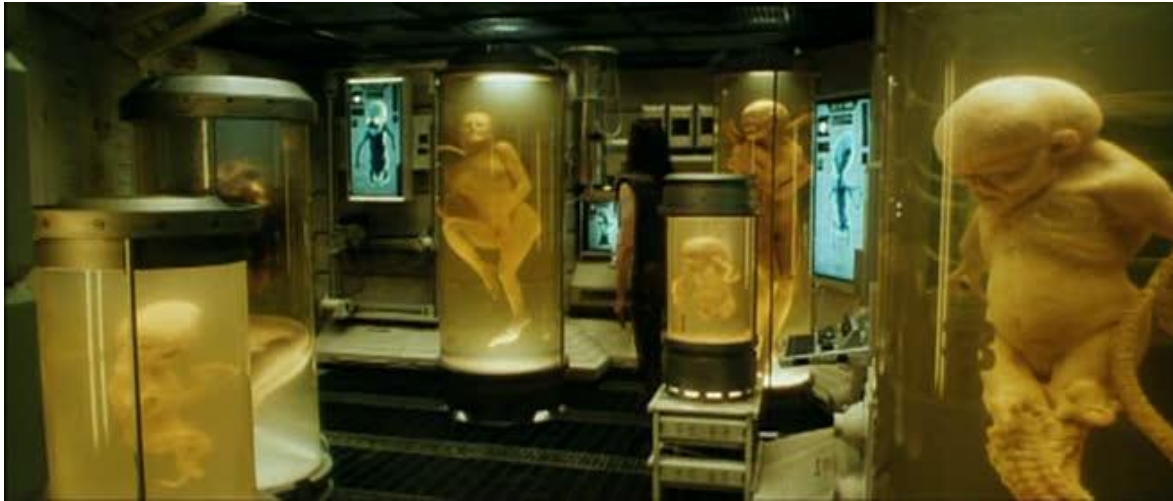
After the undulating, fleshy title sequence, the issue of monstrosity is introduced bluntly. Ripley's adult voice provides a voiceover as her body develops and grows. She echoes Newt's observation in *Aliens*, speaking as her and for her, and drawing from the 'instinctual memories' she has been gifted by her Alien DNA. "My mommy always said there were no monsters, no real ones..." introduces Ripley-as-child, but as she ages rapidly into adult-Ripley, dissolving from one form into another, she adds, "...but there are". The inference is rich and ambiguous. The scientists and their reproductive experiments are monstrous, but Ripley 8's becoming-Alien is also grossly underestimated by them. (This relationship is visually articulated later as a scientist looks into an isolation cell that holds some of the Queen's newborn drones; he and a drone look at each other through the glass, mirroring one another, before the Alien startles the scientist by rapidly extending its pharyngeal jaws). As Ripley 8 attains adulthood / maturity, red lights flash around her, signalling that the Queen inside her is ready for harvest, but these pulses of red light are juxtaposed against her relaxed,

benign face, creating a sense of dissonance, fear and uncertainty. Given the spectator's presumed familiarity with the series, it also acts as a visual hint of dramatic irony.

Although the scientists call this "meat by-product" Ripley, she is an explicitly different creature altogether. Ripley 8 looks human, and she is very tall. Her clothes are dark, slick and shiny, like the Alien's exoskeleton. Her blood is acidic. She has enormous strength, heightened Alien instincts and senses, and quick reflexes. She moves in a serpentine fashion and expresses a predatory sexuality. She is amused – or, perhaps, bemused – by the destruction wrought by the escaped xenomorphs; after the first, deadly encounter between the Aliens and the mercenary smugglers, she suggestively asks them "was it all that you hoped for?" The rogue android Annalee Call – a further advance on the Ash and Bishop models, and gifted (or cursed) with an enormous sense of empathy – warns her mercenary crewmates that Ripley 8 "will turn on us in second". Ripley 8 has an almost telepathic connection with the network of xenomorphs. She feels the cloned Queen's pain as she begins to give birth and feels drawn to her; that is, she is part of a larger Alien aggregate. She is a bloc of becoming, and in the context of the four films, it is a becoming that has been in progress since her first encounter with the Alien xenomorph in *Alien*: a process of transformation and translation that has changed both Ripley and the Alien, and expanded each of their capacities and affects. Now, Ripley 8's allegiances are uncertain; as Anna Powell notes, "Our clear-cut identification with Ripley as hero in the previous films is undermined. We are no longer sure of her nature, her powers or her agenda" (Powell, *Deleuze and Horror Film* 75). Twice Ripley 8 is asked to identify herself; the first time she draws from her inherited memory and answers "Ripley, Ellen, Lieutenant first class, number 36706"; but later, she introduces herself as "the monster's mother".

Camera work and editing contributes to this instability and uncertainty. The use of a fish eye lens continues, drawing from the visual language of the Alien's "vision" in *Alien*<sup>3</sup>, as well as referring to the undulating images of the credit sequence. In conjunction with low angle shots, this distorts space into a broad becoming-Alien that is present even out the outset. The camera is rarely static for more than a few seconds. It often frames the shot from a low or a canted angle, and moves along corridors and around characters smoothly, sometimes rushing towards them or past them. This dizzying sense of speed and movement is destabilising, and adds to what Teresa Rizzo





**Fig 6.11 Abortive lines:** Ripley 8 inspects the previous, non-viable iterations of the Ripley-Queen clone. The sickly yellow light conveys a sense of organic decay (*Alien: Resurrection*).

calls the film's "sense of movement and transition" ("The *Alien* Series" 330). Again, as the xenomorphs escape and the ship, as a human and Company space, becomes-Alien, the colours slip slowly from blues, whites and metallic greys to murky browns and sepia tones. As Ripley 8 discovers, then destroys, her fellow clones, the image is bathed in a sickly yellow that expresses infection and unease.

I suggest that two scenes exemplify Ripley's becoming-Alien, and both explicitly deal with the Company's attempts to control and commodify reproduction. The first is Ripley 8's horrified discovery and extermination of her seven cloned predecessors. Each is a blunted iteration of the Ripley-Queen assemblage, aborted because of the imperviously knotted conjunction of Queen and Ripley, which renders it useless to the scientists. A rhizome may be snapped or shattered at any point "but will start up again on one of its old lines, or new lines"; so, each clone is formed from Ripley-Queen DNA and grows and develops in both familiar and unfamiliar ways (fig. 6.11). Six clones are suspended in cylindrical tanks, each lit for display; three recall the developmental stages of the human foetus and three look to be adult. Each posits a different interference pattern of Ripley and the Queen, a different contorted combination of Alien and human features. One has Ripley's face and long dark hair, but protruding from her cheek is a fanged, grimacing alien mouth; one has Ripley's body and the exposed ribs





**Fig. 6.12 “Look! He thinks you’re its mother!”** The newborn human-alien hybrid regards Ripley 8 and licks her, recognising her – and not the cloned Queen – as its mother. Note the rich sepia tones of the Alien milieu (*Alien: Resurrection*).

and elongated skull of the Alien (as well as an eye, out of place, staring from her shoulder). Another has a fat foetal human head, covered in a spider web-like membrane, and a long Alien tail. Each is seen through the convex pane of their tank, further distorting the image, and recalling the amorphous viscera of the film’s opening. A seventh clone is in a separate room, still alive contorted and in agony, with an incision in her chest from where her own, ‘failed’ infant Queen was removed, and she begs Ripley 8 to kill her. Anna Powell argues that the “scientists on the ship are themselves the most monstrous beings on the ship, despite their fully human genetic status... Here, [assemblages] have been enforced ... causing terrible suffering” (*Deleuze and Horror Film* 74). Each clone is the fleshy, physical expression of a destructive or aborted line of flight.

The second explicit depiction of Ripley’s becoming-Alien is no less horrific, but is considerably more ambiguous, for horror is intertwined with desire – both erotic desire and Deleuzoguattarian ‘desire’, that is, the positive and productive material flows that constitute life. Ripley 8 is telepathically ‘summoned’ by the cloned Queen who is in the throes of labour, and Ripley 8 falls into a pulsating nest of xenomorphs beneath the metal grates that form the ship’s halls and walkways. There is a swelling fanfare and an insectile chittering. No one creature is identifiable; rather, Ripley 8 lies, half-conscious

and almost beatific in an undulating slippery brown-black sea of coiled tails, tentacles, limbs and twitching alien body parts. Ripley 8's dark, shiny clothes blend into the throbbing alien milieu and at first she is only identifiable by her pale skin. Soon she is slowly absorbed and pulled into the morass of Alien-ness, and the nest is overcome by darkness: she is a willing participant and component of this assemblage, and an immanent part in an Alien plateau.

During brief takes that fade to darkness, Ripley 8 is carried to the Queen's hive by a xenomorph, and their embrace expresses a bestial, sexual coupling – an Alien alliance that is emotional and physical, rather than one predicated on opposition and antagonism. The hive recalls the vast biomechanoid halls of the derelict ship in *Alien*, but this time there is no field of eggs. Ripley's unintentional 'gift' to the Queen has been a human reproductive system that allows her to birth live young instead of relying on a parasitic cycle of eggs, larvae and hosts. This is the realisation of the Queen's own becoming-Ripley, first hinted at in the climax of *Aliens*. A newborn xenomorph – a Alien-human hybrid – emerges messily from a split in the Queen's abdomen, but soon turns on its mother, violently killing her, before turning to Ripley 8 in filial recognition (fig. 6.12): its own becoming-human (Powell, *Deleuze and Horror Film* 76). This radical, unforeseen, rhizomatic consequence of the cloning process – this visceral budding – is at total odds with the Company's intention to re-create and control the Alien. Instead, they have created something even more dangerous than before.

In keeping with the action-film conventions of the earlier films, Ripley 8 reassumes the role of action hero and saviour of humanity by destroying both the Alien threat and the Company research vessel that houses the experiments. This act, perhaps, undermines the subversion of much of the film, but the potential for productive, rich and consensual new becomings and new lines of flight remains and grows. As they fly over Earth in the smugglers' ship – the first time we have seen our 'home' planet over the course of the four films – the mercenary android Annalee Call and Ripley 8, gaze through clouds and across continents. Annalee, who has for so long passed as a 'real' human but who has never been to Earth, remarks that she didn't expect it to be so beautiful, and she then asks Ripley 8 "What happens now?" Ripley 8's reply is open, hopeful and accentuates both her difference and their shared lack of biological 'humanity': "I don't know. I'm a stranger here myself".

## THE POTENTIAL FOR FUTURE BECOMINGS

As indicated earlier, Deleuze and Guattari argue that “good and bad are only products of an active and temporary selection, which must be renewed” (ATP10). While the Alien and the Company – equally aggressive, violent and opportunistic - are both expressed in predominantly negative ways, Ripley 8 is a more ambiguous entity. At the end of the *Alien: Resurrection*, Ripley 8, as a new species, “is left with the potential for future becomings” (Powell, *Deleuze and Horror Film* 75), and it is the potential of these becomings that marks the *Alien* series as a particularly unusual gynaehorror.

Throughout the four films, the Company – in its various guises, as statist structures, the military and through the microfascisms of individual and corporation – attempts to control and stratify the Alien, in particular the reproductive potential of the Alien Queen and the maternal affect of Ripley. However, the Alien’s molecular line, and the unpredictable lines of flight engendered through Ripley’s becoming-Alien and the Alien’s becoming-Ripley, provide a direct challenge to this co-option, for while their lines of flight might be captured and reterritorialised – such as with Ripley’s re-employment by the Company at the outset of *Aliens* – they may also fly free, with positive outcomes (Ripley 8’s survival) or negative (the Alien Queen’s new reproductive system, and her death at the hands of her offspring) .

Many of the films that I have discussed in prior chapters, such as *The Unborn* (Flender US 1991), *Godsend* (Hamm US-CAN 2004) and *Splice* (2009) offer visceral, unpleasant and often profoundly negative explorations of reproductive science and the maternal in films. In contrast to these cautionary tales of ‘mad science run amok’, with this analysis I have demonstrated that the *Alien* films, through narrative, style and aesthetic, map a process of becoming that offers an expression (rather than a representation) of the monstrous and the maternal that acknowledges the potential of fortuitous alliances and assemblages, rather than presenting the horrific as a monstrous Other to a fixed subject, or as something abject, to be jettisoned or resolved. The *Alien* films are certainly horrific in content, and both the unruly Alien’s fecundity and violence and the Company’s attempts to control people and bodies are expressions of profound conflict and monstrosity. Through a schizoanalytic lens, becomings are not a negative consequence of these conflicts, but a desirous and productive way of expressing new ways of being and expanded affective capacities. This is not to argue that all becomings

in horror cinema and horrific texts are to be celebrated, nor that such an approach is sustainable or practical for all horror texts. Rather, this analysis demonstrates how to better make “active and temporary selection[s]” (ATP 10) by suggesting that monstrous does not inherently mean negative. Here I have shown that the process of mapping both explicit and abstract expressions of desire, power and transformation can prove fruitful and surprising, and can offer a new perspective on the horror genre.

## CONCLUSION

*Ginger: A girl can only be a slut, a bitch, a tease or the virgin next door.*

*Ginger Snaps* (Fawcett CAN 2000)

*I enjoy body horror that relates to the female body. I NEED body horror that does. Because like a lot of horror fans, we watch horror to face things that we might fear, or are disgusted by, or that just fascinate us. And lots of horrific things happen to women all the time. I need films about monster babies tearing themselves out of women, or vagina dentatas, or the horror of mensuration [sic]. Because damn it, those are MY fears. Being a women [sic] is fucking scary sometimes.*

Blogger Kweeny Todd on the value of Women in Horror Month 2014,  
"Maybe I Like My Edge Thanks: On Being A Female Monster Kid"

Over the course of this thesis, while providing an overview of gynaehorror – a subgenre and a thematic strain that I suggest has been undertheorised - I have outlined the practical use and value of looking beyond dominant (psychoanalytic) models of horror film scholarship and of using horror films to investigate new ways of exploring and utilising theory. I have done this for two reasons. The first is to provide a close-grained appraisal of key aspects of gynaehorror, particularly films or specific areas of inquiry that have not received a great deal of sustained scholarly attention. To achieve this I have provided dedicated analyses of the representation and expression of female corporeality, virginity, 'dangerous' female sexuality, pregnancy, abortion, reproductive technology and motherhood, and have done so in such a way that connects these areas to each other and to broader issues of gender and horror.

My second reason is more abstract, but no less practical: I have sought to demonstrate and explore the specific use-value of theoretical models that have not been

widely applied within the area of horror studies, in the hope that one field may enrich the other. While I have achieved this through discussions of space, heterosexuality, gender, subjectivity and discourse, this is most apparent in my final chapter, in which I provide an extensive case study outlining the potential of applying the process of schizoanalysis to film. So, each of my chapters can be considered a discussion or a dialectic – the sort of “performative theorisation” (Hills 214) that augments both the understanding and cultural value of gynaehorror while also testing alternative forms of critical theory and philosophy against expressions of bodies and women in popular culture. To draw from Deleuze and Guattari, each chapter can be considered as a rupture in and the budding of a rhizome, or perhaps as a line of flight: an exploratory and productive act that results in new congruencies and unexpected commonalities by making a map of the conceptual interaction between intellectual, aesthetic and filmic expressions of women, bodies, power, film and theory.

Some of these congruencies and commonalities recur with startling frequency throughout this thesis. Isabel Cristina Pinedo, in her 1997 book *Recreational Terror*, highlights five aspects that work together to constitute the postmodern (that is, post 1968) horror film, namely that it features a violent disruption of the everyday world, a transgression or violation of boundaries, a questioning of the validity of rationality and the repudiation of narrative closure, all while providing a ‘bounded’ (that is, a spatially and temporally finite(41)) experience of fear (17). As she phrases it, “horror exposes the terror *implicit* in everyday life: the pain of loss, the enigma of death, the unpredictability of events, the inadequacy of intentions” (39, emphasis original). What has struck me over the course of writing this thesis is how the first four of these criteria come to be expressed in the gynaehorror film: in an embodied, highly personal and explicitly gendered manner that very often renders the woman in question as complicit in her own demise. I suggest that the ‘implicit terror’ of gynaehorror is that the gynophobic, misogynistic construction of women within a patriarchal society is correct and that the female, sexed body really *is* monstrous: a seeping, fecund and dangerous thing that must be managed, silenced and oppressed, and which the female subject must eternally rail against, or be controlled by.

Take, for example, Roman Polanski’s 1968 film *Rosemary’s Baby*, a touchstone gynaehorror and a film to which I have returned frequently throughout this thesis. The

violent disruption and the transgression of boundaries both occur for Rosemary when she is drugged by her husband and her neighbours so that she may be raped by a demonic presence and thus play host to the Antichrist. This violation is writ across Rosemary's body throughout the film, both as her belly swells, and as she becomes increasingly sickly through feeding the demonic foetus with her own vitality (see fig 1.3 in chapter one). The questioning of rationality is not just the shock of the realisation that Rosemary's doddering, elderly neighbours come from a line of Satanists and that her husband would so easily betray her, but that Rosemary herself is thrust into a state of addled confusion and that she is cruelly branded as neurotic and hysterical by her husband, her neighbours and their associates – even after the birth of the child. Finally, the repudiation of closure is deeply personal: in the film's final moments, Rosemary seems to acquiesce to the Satanists' request that she stay and fulfil her role as the child's mother, and to accept that she is the only person who can mother him properly. Each of these steps place Rosemary, her body and especially her femaleness at the centre of the horror. This, perhaps, is the overwhelming commonality of these films – that the women in them are very often fighting to be recognised as whole subjects *in spite* of their 'fallable', penetrable bodies, their devalued femininity, and their potential capacity to be get pregnant, give birth, and maybe be mothers. This is a grim prospect indeed.

The overall implication of my active theorisation of and with horror, to me, is that while it is necessary to acknowledge those seminal pieces that have shaped early appraisals of women in horror – namely, the essential foundational work that has been done by Linda Williams ("When the Woman Looks"), Carol J. Clover (*Men, Women, and Chain Saws*) and Barbara Creed (*The Monstrous-Feminine*) – it is very important that scholars continue to expand the 'arsenal' of critical horror theory. This needs to be done by continuing to develop frameworks such as the Final Girl and the monstrous-feminine, for these (influential and very helpful) concepts are now nearly thirty years old, while also exploring alternative methodologies and identifying other key features of the representation and expression of gynaehorror. Early work on gender and the horror genre cannot be taken at face value, nor can it be considered ahistorical. It is also crucial to consider that filmmakers have, themselves, reintegrated and critiqued these ideas in knowing, inventive and imaginative ways. There exists a sophisticated relationship between past theoretical engagements with films of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, and

present expressions of horror, such that the legacy of Creed and Clover is as deeply ingrained within the modern horror film as that of slasher villains Freddy Kreuger and Jason Voorhees. This is something that is made apparent in the self-reflexive film *The Cabin in the Woods* (Godard US 2012), which highlights and questions the viewer's bloodlust for the 'sacrifice' offered by the deaths of young teenagers in slasher films, particularly the suffering endured by the (allegedly) virginal Final Girl, while simultaneously fulfilling its gruesome generic parameters (and doing so in a critically and economically successful manner) and providing the dedicated and nostalgic horror fan with dozens of canny references to canonical films and key tropes.

However, there are areas that I have neglected to address in substantial detail. As I indicated in my introduction, one of the key limitations of this thesis is the lack of diversity of women in the films and areas that I have analysed. On the whole, the women who feature in the films that I have discussed fulfil a hegemonic western ideal of femininity by being white, conventionally attractive, heterosexual and often middle class and young, and as such there are some enormous absences that remain to be interrogated (Kuhn 71). There is certainly scope for further analysis here, for instance, in terms of considering the dearth of women of colour in the horror film through an intersectional analysis of race, gender and genre.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, one question that may be of use to the horror scholar is whether filmmakers' knowing recirculation of horror tropes, as in *The Cabin in the Woods*, serves not only to acknowledge but to perpetuate, rather than disrupt, issues of inequality – a question that reframes each act of self-conscious borrowing as a political act.

By way of an example, a problematic 'if you can't beat 'em, join 'em' mentality is present in the torture-centric horror film *Hostel II* (Roth US 2007). Like its predecessor, it features a group of American college students who, while travelling abroad, are captured to be sold to wealthy businessmen. These men pay their 'hunting lodge' for the 'privilege' of torturing and killing the abductees in an extreme account of consumerism and the commodification of bodies and individuals in a neoliberal late capitalist society. Where the first *Hostel* film (Roth US 2005) featured a group of boorish young men on a boozy European vacation, the sequel focuses on a group of female friends. What is

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<sup>1</sup> ... in a manner that moves beyond simply acknowledging the cliché that is humorously described by online tropes and idioms encyclopedia tvtropes.org as "Black Dude Dies First".



interesting, to me, about *Hostel II* is the assertion by its creator, Eli Roth, that his work is feminist (Corbett) because of its critique of patriarchal systems of dominance and because one of the female victims is able to escape her fate by using her substantial inheritance to buy membership to the torture club – even though much of the violence directed at the young women in the film is highly sexualised. As such, Roth references and rewrites the Final Girl narrative by having his heroine survive not only through her wits but through her economic clout and her (implicitly masculine) ability to negotiate business deals. Thus, she remains a complicit part of the voracious patriarchal and misogynistic capitalist machine that the *Hostel* films attempt to critique, something that is emphasised when she receives her lodge membership tattoo on her lower back (in place of a ‘tramp stamp’) instead of her arm, and when we see, at the film’s conclusion, that she finds the female lodge employee who had arranged her friends’ bondage and beheads her. As Maisha Wester asserts, while *Hostel II* (and Roth’s other films) clearly both mock and offer a nuanced critique of patriarchy and conventional gender roles, particularly through their grotesque exploration of crises of masculinity, this does not mean that they necessarily participate in any of feminism’s wider projects (387), and ultimately they do not seek to meaningfully challenge capitalist individualism (399). What is also obvious is that despite the loose interrogation of women’s place in a gendered system of power and economics, and whether or not the heroine overcomes great odds, the visual language of the film – like others similar to it – relies predominantly on the commodification of sexualised images of (often brutalised) women’s bodies, presumably for an appreciative heterosexual male gaze.

There are, of course, potential ways through this conundrum. The academic study of pop culture can and should also look to the work of fans and artists, for horror scholars are, themselves, fans – albeit ‘scholar-fans’ (Church 236) – who are researching actively and writing in a different register, within a system of peer-review for a somewhat different audience. As I finished writing the introduction to this thesis, a friend – another female horror fan – pointed me towards the website of “Women in Horror Month”. This world-wide initiative, which was first run in February 2009, aims to highlight, celebrate and promote the role and achievements of female (and female-identifying) film makers and artists working within the male-dominated horror genre, through positive events such as film screenings, forums, and blood drives. Earlier in the

writing process, another (very generous) friend gifted me a signed copy of the extraordinary *House of Psychotic Women*, a beautifully presented 2012 book by writer and film programmer Kier-La Janisse that describes itself on the cover as “an autobiographical topography of female neurosis in horror and exploitation films”. It features a lengthy illustrated appendix – ‘The Compendium of Female Neurosis’ – which offers 134 pages worth of commentary on hundreds of films from around the world, and it is an invaluable resource for any scholar of gender and horror. Both of these endeavours speak to an abundant enthusiasm for the topic of women in horror and both privilege female voices and experiences. I suggested at the outset of this thesis that the scholarly appraisal of women in horror needs expanding, but it is worth remembering, too, that a great deal of good work (and inventive, provocative and intelligent work, at that) is being done in this field beyond the walls of the academy – and that horror scholars are fans, too.

This enthusiasm, in particular from female fans and filmmakers, will also have an impact upon the future shape of the genre. In the majority of films I have discussed in this thesis, sexual difference is writ large – often necessarily, because my selection criteria has explicitly focused on the sexual life and expression of women, and within a patriarchal, phallo(go)centric society woman is Other by very definition. Certainly, Martin Fradley’s assertion that the modern teen horror genre predominantly addresses young women (206) is correct, and some of the films that I have analysed, such as *Grace* and *Triangle*, do an exceptional job of interrogating and privileging female experience. However, it is notable that only three of the nearly 200 films I reference in this thesis were directed by women (*Make A Wish*, *Teknolust* and *Jennifer’s Body*), and just over one in ten featured a woman on the scriptwriting team. So, while I reiterate my point that the women in these films are not a diverse set, perhaps it is at least in part because, industrially, female voices are rare within the genre. As these voices slowly make their way into the mainstream – or, at the very least, become less marginalised - it will be interesting and enriching to chart how expressions of gynaehorror change and what forms they may take.

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